of PURDUE CALUMET THE FINE ARTS ANNUAL J. A. M. M. A. M. M. A. M. M. A. M. M. A. M. M. A. M. M. A. M. M. A. M. M. A. M. M. A. M. 10th Anniversary Issue



Jlark



We, the Editors of Skylark, cordially invite you to celebrate our tenth anniversary with us. We hope you enjoy the wide range of artistic form represented

The purpose of this publication is to share the dreams, aspirations and creativity of many people. We have joined the collective talents of all ages and capabilities to produce a multifaceted instrument of expression.

All staff members are appreciative students of the fine arts, not critics. This

magazine is a product of enthusiasm, hard work and love.

Professional assistance was cheerfully provided by Charles B. Tinkham, English professor at Purdue Calumet, who has sponsored Skylark since its inception, and Linda Preston and John Allison, who donated their precious hours and eyes to copyread and judge staff entries.

We would like to thank everyone who gave so generously of their time, money, labor and creativity. Our only regret is that we could not publish everything.

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In Memory of Robert D. Jewell, our beloved brother and son. You remain an inspiraton to us all.

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Winning Selections

All entries were judged only after the editors made sure that the name of the author did not appear anywhere on the submitted manuscript. Staff members were not eligible to win prizes.

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Snow Fool

"Beer beer beer!!"

The first time I saw Snow Fool I was five years old, sitting on my grand-mother's front porch. The first time, anyway, that I remember seeing him. I must have seen him before, but this time stuck into my memory. Maybe because he was standing in the snow, so that I remembered him on account of his nickname.

I was sitting there with my grand-mother, who had her hair tied in a long braid in the back, a braid her sister did for her on Sunday mornings after Granny had washed her hair on Saturday night. A big bag of walnuts was on the porch between us, and we were cracking and shelling. Mostly I was smashing the nuts with a hammer and eating what could be saved from the wreckage. So there we sat, Granny in a cane chair my grandfather had woven, and down the road came Snow Fool.

Snow Fool had a name, a Christian name, just like all the other Christians in the mountains where we lived. His name was Jace, which was short for Jorace, but it might as well have been Alexander the Great because nobody called him either one. I don't even know how I found out his name; all I ever heard him called was Snow Fool, or mostly just Fool in the summer.

So yonder came Snow Fool, kicking up clouds of the dry powdery snow, and just like he'd figured out what would most annoy Granny, he was yelling "beer!" every couple of kicks. Granny tried to ignore him, being a Christian, but being a Christian, she couldn't. "Beer beer beer!!" he came on past the house.

As I recall, he stopped, facing the porch, and pulled off his red and blue sock cap, which left his hair sticking out like he'd just had electroshock.

"Hey, Miz Stack. Good afternoon. You wouldn't have no bottles of beer there in your house, would you? And you too, little Toby."

Little Toby was me, and I wondered how this stranger knew who I was. He must have remembered seeing me before I remembered seeing him.

"We don't keep beer in this house, Snow. I'm surprised you wouldn't know that."

"I ain't never looked in your refrigerator."

"Well, there's no beer, there never has been. There won't be none while I live." "Sorry I bothered you, Miz Stack. I'll go on down to the preacher's. I have had occasion to look into his refrigerator. I reckon he'll have some. Beer beer!!" And off he went in a cloud of snow up to his knees. By the way, Granny called Snow Fool just Snow. She was the only one that ever did that, on account, she said, that it says in the Bible not to call anybody a fool. Even if they are one, she'd add.

After that I do remember Snow Fool now and then on through the years. As I said, his real name was Jace, and I believe he was about eighteen the first time I saw him. He lived with his mother, who was a seamstress in town. They had come to our town, that is to say, the closest town to us, which we called ours, from somewhere in Tage county, the next one over. Snow Fool's daddy was long gone. Years later my uncle told me he remembered Fool's daddy, who, he said, "just lived for the sight of a whore, didn't matter none what color she was." According to my uncle. Snow Fool's daddy had run off to look for "whorehopper heaven." My uncle was a fool himself. He just hid it better.

Another time I remember Snow Fool was when he was just Fool; in the summer, that is. I think I was around ten then, and I was going fishing with my neighbor Jackie, who was my age, and his sister Ann, who was a few years older. The three of us had simple fishing poles, the kind lots of kids carry, that they make themselves. We also had one tin can of worms that Ann had dug up in their back yard.

"Thar comes Fool," said Jackie. We were walking down the paved road where you turned off to the creek. "Damn."

"Can't talk like that, Jackie," Ann scolded him.

"Paw says 'damn'."

"Don't care if Paw does say 'damn, you can't say 'damn'."

"Reckon I damn well can."

"I'll tell Gram, and we'll see who says 'damn'."

While they were busy "damning" at each other, we met Fool. He was wearing a long-sleeve white shirt and a tie, pretty poorly tied. "Where y'all goin'?" Fool asked.

"We going fishin, Fool," Ann answered.

"What with?"

"Nightcrawlers."

"Nightcrawlers. Lemme see." He took the can from Jackie and pulled out one long reddish-black worm, holding it between two fingers. It twisted and curled up over his fingers.

"You ever eat a nightcrawler, Jackie?"

"No. Ain't gonna, neither."

"I believe," said Fool, "you're operatin' under what the preacher called pre-judice. You have pre-judiced against this worm. Cause they're mighty tasty." With that he held the thin squirming worm up over his mouth, his head tilted back and his mouth wide open.

"Oh, damn!" Ann yelled. I felt sick and looked down at the ground. Jackie was making a disgusted noise, and when I looked up Ann had her eyes squeezed tight. Fool had his hands down by his side and was half smiling, sucking his teeth.

"You made my stomach hurt," I said.

"It'll feel better if you'll eat one of these," Fool held the can out to me.

I looked away and made a little gagging noise.

"Y'all can't take no joke. I didn't eat that worm." He held it up, still squirming, and dropped it back in the can. "I don't eat worms." He handed the can back to Jackie. "Unless they cooked."

My mouth was all bitter tasting, and I sure didn't see no damn joke.

Sometime along in the fall, when folks started thinking about winter, Fool changed into Snow Fool. He somehow got to be called Snow Fool because he didn't seem to mind the cold, but would sit out in the snow, sometimes just sit there, singing or talking to himself or whoever passed by. He could stay out in the snow all day long, wandering around in the mountains, and never get cold. Not that anybody knew anyway.

But Snow Fool wasn't important to anybody, not really. He was a curiosity around the area, but nobody ever thought about him when he wasn't around. The preacher from the Baptist church, where my family went, felt sorry for Snow Fool and would have him to dinner a lot, but he never could get him into church. It probably didn't matter, though, cause I reckon he must have preached Snow Fool near to death while he ate. I don't think Snow Fool

minded a bit. I believe he just sat there with a mouth jammed full of cornbread, stretching out his hand for a porkchop, while the preacher told him about the evils of Jezebel. At that time, as a matter of fact, Snow Fool was probably pleased to hear about Jezebel. No matter how much folks preached at him and tried to convert him, he stayed a sinner. At least by our reckoning he was a sinner, and we had given a good deal of thought to the subject, just where that line was, and just what it was you could do, as well as what you could do for fun and still be able to repent later.

Snow Fool was not at that time a Christian by the definition I knew. He drank any time he could, the sin in that being that he didn't hide the fact, but was open about it. After we were young men, Jackie told me that Snow Fool "woulda been a whorehopper like his daddy, but he didn't know how." Snow Fool did like women though, and when he thought he was "with the boys," he would grin and ask us if we had done this and done that, using words he'd picked up. We used to discuss whether Snow Fool had really done those things and whether he even knew what they were. He was the only middle-aged man we knew (him being at the time just past thirty) who'd talk to us like he did. We didn't think much about asking each other, "Did you get it wet last Saturday?," but we thought it was pretty funny to have Snow Fool come leering up saying such things. Most of us figured that Snow Fool had never done it, because what woman in her right mind would want to get in bed with him? Jackie also told me that Gus Grady had caught Snow Fool jerking off in his barn. Jackie was simply an encyclopedia of sin.

I think as I got older my interest in Snow Fool even decreased. When I was twenty-five, I married Jackie's sister Ann. I guess she was glad to marry me as she was getting pretty well up there for anyone to be courting her. Besides which, we'd been going to bed together for two years, and both of us sort of felt, though I don't recall either one ever mentioning it, that that kind of gave us a reason to get married. She didn't get pregnant then, though, because she used to jump up and down after we were done. It was a trick she had learned from an older cousin over in Tage county. But anyhow, I didn't marry her from obligation, but because I wanted to. If I hadn't of, I wouldn't of. After we were married, Ann quit jumping up and down, and we had a daughter. And round that time I've got stretches of years in my memory when I can't remember anything at all about Snow Fool.

But he was always around. We buried my blind old Granny, and later in the afternoon, after the funeral, I was walking in the woods when I ran into Snow Fool. It was January, and I had on a heavy coat, a fur hat and mittens. Snow Fool had a lot lighter coat than mine, a grey cap on top of his head, not covering his ears, and no gloves or mittens.

I came on him real sudden. He was sitting on a log that was still covered with snow. "Toby," he said.

I jumped, because the woods were so quiet, and I didn't know he was there.

"It's me."

"Snow Fool."

"Sittin' in the snow." He grinned. Anyone else I'd have wondered if they weren't cold, but I knew he wasn't. Or if he was, he didn't show it.

"Sorry about your Granny," he said.

"How'd you know?"

"Preacher told me."

"Oh, yeah."

"I'll have a service for her this evening."

"Do what?"

'I'll have a service for her."

It was the usual nonsense, but I said, "I didn't think you believed in church."

"Depends on whose church it is. If it's my church, I don't mind it none." He picked up a handful of snow and began to eat it.

"Preacher finally get you into church?"

He stopped munching for a second. "Him? Naw." Then he reached for more snow.

The next year Snow Fool started doing something he'd never done. He came by our house Christmas Eve, in the afternoon, carrying a dirty cloth bag, asking us for old biscuits or cornbread. Nobody, nobody at all, knew how Snow Fool lived, how he got by. His mother had died several years before and was buried in the cemetery of the Methodist church which she had attended sometimes. Snow Fool wouldn't go near the Methodist church, even before his mother was buried there. But how he lived and ate after she died, nobody thought enough about him to really wonder a lot about it. Or maybe Preacher thought about it, I don't know. When Snow Fool started coming by asking for bread, it seemed so natural that he was begging that we just wondered why he hadn't done it before.

We invited him in for a meal, offered him a lot more than dry bread, but he just surprised me and said if we had any old biscuits he'd be proud, but he didn't need anything else. So we gave him some leftover bread, and he went on his way through the snow, singing "O Little Town of Bethlehem."

From then on, every year Snow Fool came by on Christmas Eve asking for old bread. We always invited him for something more, but he never took anything more than the bread. We figured after a while that he didn't take the bread because he was hungry because he never asked for food other than that. It was my daughter, Jeanie, who decided what he wanted the bread for.

"He's feedin' the birds," she said, and it seemed reasonable to me. So we got accustomed to getting bread ready on Christmas Eve for Snow Fool to collect, and he always came by.

One year I was out in back chopping wood when Snow Fool came along. He went to the side door, got his bread, and stomping a minute on the little porch, went on. I wasn't chopping when he came, but had stopped to rest. I was leaning on my axe, looking at the knot on a piece of oak that I knew was going to win. Then I heard a knock on the door, and Snow Fool's voice saying, "Y'all got any old biscuits or cornbread you been planning to throw out?" Of course he must have known we did, or he should have known, but he always asked. When I heard him leaving, I suddenly wondered where he was going, just where he took this bread every year. I figured he must just go throw it out in a field somewhere, but my curiosity, my "cattish qualification" as Granny had said of me, made me want to follow him. So I lay the axe back in the woodshed and went around the house where I saw Snow Fool down the road a ways.

I went off into the woods and followed him from there, keeping way back, and waiting while he stopped at other houses. Finally he went into the woods himself, and then it was hard for me to keep him in sight without letting him know I was following him. A lot of the time I just followed his tracks and didn't worry that my own tracks would give away that I'd been there. Finally I creeped up over a hill and could hear him talking down below. Lying down low, cold, with my face in the snow, I peered over the hill. I saw a

clearing and, in the middle of it, an evergreen tree. Snow Fool was standing at the tree using pieces of string to tie all the bread on the tree, and while he did he was talking to himself. In a few minutes he had bread hung all over the tree like it was a Christmas tree, and he thought the same thing because he was saying, "Here you go, birds, I fixed this tree here for you. Go ahead, it's yours. Nice Christmas tree for the birds."

Then, when he had the tree covered with bread, he went over to the side and sat down in the snow, leaning up against the trunk of a tall sweetgum tree.

I waited a bit to see what he would do, and all the while I was freezing in the snow. Then, when I decided that the crazy damn Snow Fool was just going to sit there and watch the birds eat, he started talking again. A few birds were flying down, pecking at the tree, landing near it. And Snow Fool started talking again.

"Enjoy the Christmas tree, birds. I'm gonna tell y'all birds a story while y'all are eatin' and don't notice. There was this baby born somewhere, I can't remember, but he was Jesus. Y'all know who Jesus is? I'm gonna tell you. He is the Lord, Lord God. And he was born with these smart men and angels, and he said, 'For God so loved the world that he sent me.' Now that's true, it's written down. Now birds, y'all listen. If you eat his body, you go to heaven. It ain't nasty, like it sounds, and this here cornbread is Jesus' body. I don't know how it is, but it is. And

y'all gonna go to heaven too, long as you eat. I guess they's birds in heaven like here."

Snow Fool was preaching to the birds. And just like I had imagined one time (apparently wrong) that Snow Fool shoved his mouth full of cornbread without paying attention to the preacher, now the birds did the same for him.

Stiff and shivering, I slid real quiet back down the hill until I could stand up; then I hurried as much as I could back to the main road and home. I caught a cold for Christmas day.

So Snow Fool preached to the birds, and he was saving their souls with old biscuits. I never followed him again, but I did for years after go out the day after Christmas to see if he had tied the bread to the tree, and I always found bits of bread and string hanging from the same tree. If there was snow that year, there would be hundreds of tiny bird tracks around the tree.

Like this it went on, a few more years. Snow Fool stayed Snow Fool, and I didn't tell anybody but Ann that he preached to birds. In the summer he was a Fool, and in the winter he was a Snow Fool. But every Christmas Eve there he was dragging a dirty bag to collect bread, and the day after Christmas, or whenever I got to it, I would find that tree with fresh string hanging off it.

On my forty-second birthday, in July, Jackie came by the store where I worked and asked me if I'd heard. They had found Snow Fool lying beside the road. Doctor said he must have had a heart

attack. So it happened that Snow Fool didn't get buried in his church, but in the cemetery of the Baptist church. The preacher, who was a pretty old man then, wanted it. He wasn't really the preacher anymore—they had a younger man—but he still went there, and he said that he knew Snow Fool had been a Baptist in his heart, so they allowed him to be buried there.

That year, when Christmas Eve came, I started putting some biscuits on a plate without thinking about it, then remembered about Snow Fool dying. The biscuits lay on the plate all afternoon. Late in the day, when the sun was red, I saw them, went and got my coat on, and got some string. I put the bread in a paper bag and went quiet out the side door. It was getting pretty dark in the woods, but I found the clearing where Snow Fool had his tree, since I'd been there so many times before.

Pretty quick I tied the bread on the strings and the strings on the tree. For a few minutes I stood off to one side to see if the birds would come, but it was late for them to be out, so I went back home.

The next year, though, I went out earlier, and this time I saw the birds come and eat. Every year after that I put bread on Snow Fool's tree for the birds. Or for Snow Fool. I don't know, really I don't. I never preached to the birds, though.

David Hutto West Lafayette, Indiana



The Nine Days of Christmas

the gate, American Airlines

scan faces in that thrust scan for raggy blue jeans we're trembling

we pull her out of the crush we all three hold and kiss it's two years!

arms around her all the way to the car 'am I too thin?'

'no'
but she is so light
she could have blown in
her hair, all of her
gives off light

nine days
of her lemon grass tea
meditation mornings
Tai Chi mornings
done with her dancer's grace

nine days of mother, father, daughter

and she must go back to her other family who eat only what flowers out of earth untouched by fire

leaving everywhere surprises autumn leaves from her window tree stuck in our mirror

a dish of salve small as a bottle cap 'touch some to your forehead it will open your third eye' a spangled incense burner sparkles beside the Hanukah light she wants nothing from Altman's Xmas book only my old crystal locket her grandmother's earrings her father's fraying scarf

She goes off wearing us

Bernice Fleisher New York, New York

Emptiness

Emptiness—

a jar and lid,

nothing within.

Nullus,

is a world with man,

woman forgotten.

Emptiness,

when one walks amongst and calls, -yet

no one answers.

Roel A. Gonzalez Roma, Texas

The Woman with Nothing to Do

Wandering aimlessly, drifting like fog. Making the beds, feeding the dog. Trying on dresses that fit no more. Making long lists for the grocery store. Picking up socks for the washing machine, Wondering what's on the TV screen. Eating my lunch with the frenzy of greed; Knowing that this isn't just what I need. Scrubbing the floors, dusting and such. . . How in the world have I gained so much? Husband comes home from work with his pay, Should be the end of a perfect day. My hair's hanging down, nails are a fright, But who cares? Who would I try to delight? He doesn't say Hi!, I've learned not to too. I'm told I'm the woman with nothing to do. My kids are all grown and moved away, But my life's unchanging, day after day. I know I'd like to try something new, For I'm the woman with nothing to do. Shopping alone, people passing me by, They have somewhere to go, but never have I! Stopping for coffee, a bite or two, No hurry. . .for I have nothing to do.

Sue Romesburg East Chicago, Indiana

Written in the Summer of 1980, After Meeting Helen

So few moments exist for themselves.

Lines of lifeless memories march
and in their path—
stubble of once fertile fields

A touch or a kiss—
rarely felt untied to future or past,
All grasped as links of a chain
as if then
wouldn't come
without now.

What matter the outcome? Who watches time turn into tomorrow? Eternity is a gift meant for giving like a package that will not be wrapped.

If we never know another moment, the moment we've had is for life, and that now is loved as the present and the present is loved for that now.

David B. Porter Hammond, Indiana

Haiku

The golden wheat stalk nods its grainy, yellow head at the racing wind.

Gentle moonlight falls between scented pines, pearly shafts parting the boughs.

Mary Bielat Hammond, Indiana

Proud Mouths Around Me

"Proud mouths around me clack. . . ' John Updike

I've looked long and deep down yon proud mouth spied fangs pointed north, fangs pointed south

Carious teeth, coated tongue bilious breath, attar of dung

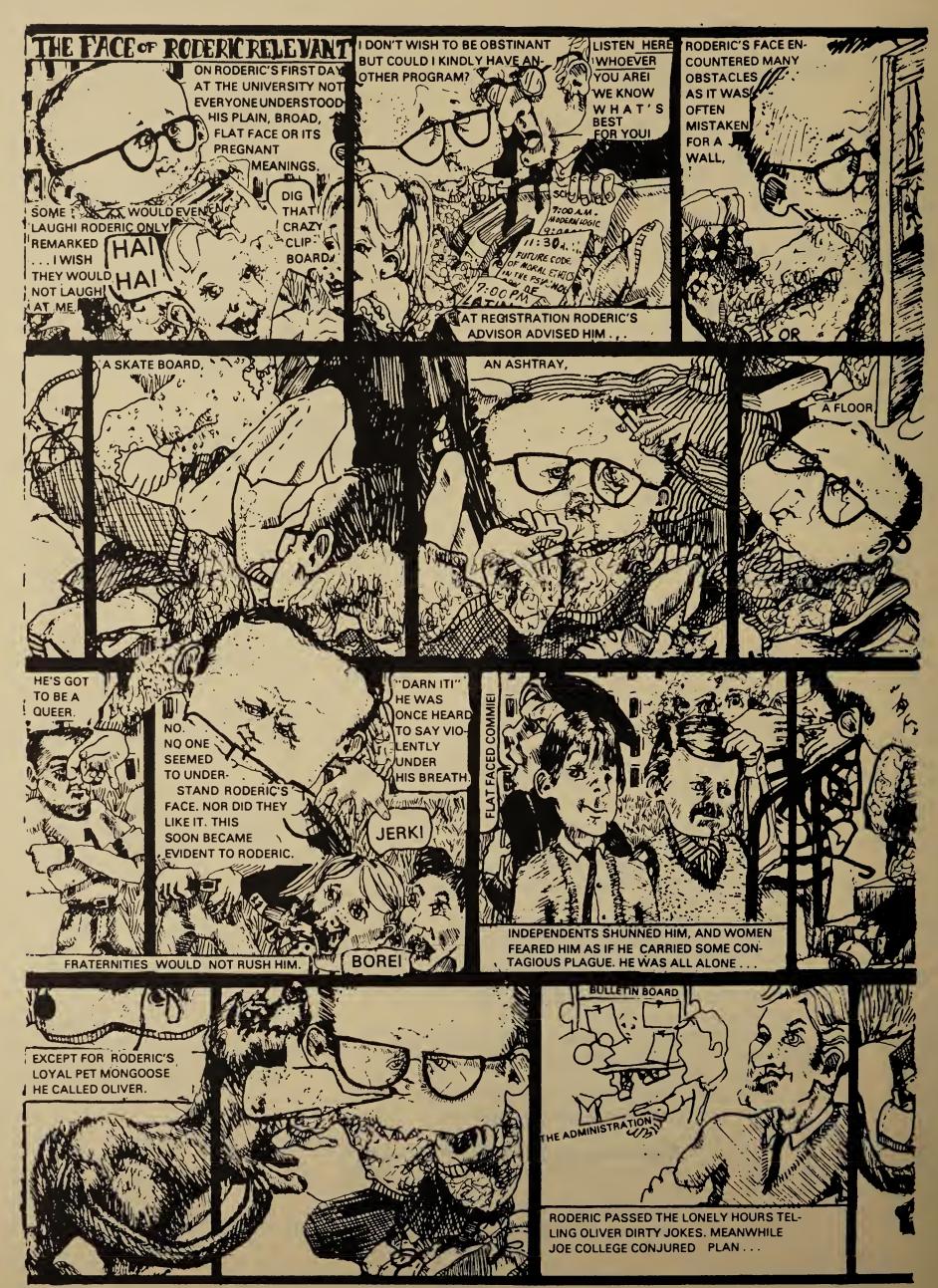
Seething out phlegm and spite and curse moue of love, leer perverse

Systemic poison, tobacco wheeze chronic peridontal disease

Molars loosen, fangs fall out gums shrink up, chew sauerkraut

Now when a proud mouth around me clacks it's porcelain choppers with hairline cracks

Mark Worden Roseburg, Oregon



"The Face of Roderic Relevant" - story by Bob Perlongo, illustration by Wendy Oldenburg.



Suicide's Life

Robinson Parker, a young man with a BA from a good school, joined President Jack Kennedy's Peace Corps in 196- and went to a mountain village in a backward country to give the natives a helping hand.

"Born to the liberal American tradition," he once said, "I wished I were dead at least once a week all the time I was growing up.

"When I became an adult I wished I were dead more often."

But wishing doesn't make it so.

The people Robinson Parker found in that foreign land were dirt poor, sick, miserable, and kicked around by a local government, a handful of rich, light-skinned landowners and middle management executives of corporations with home offices in western Europe and the U.S.A.

His father had ridden the rails with the International Workers of the World when a young man. He once shook hands with Woody Guthrie, and had tried marijuana when it was called gage. (Robinson Parker, himself, smoked it when it was called pot, but lost interest by the time everyone started to call it grass.)

Robinson Parker's dad's socialist politics were short-circuited when, being a soft touch, he lent an uneducated Jew friend a few bucks in hard times to open the first TV store in Toms River, New Jersey. Before he knew it, he had made a bundle.

By the time Robinson Parker was born, his father spoke nostalgically of his days as a union organizer but had long since forgotten what it felt like not to have really big bucks.

By the time Robinson Parker signed up for the Peace Corps, he had been armed with loads of ideas about how to help the downtrodden. He was sure he was what they needed to rise up en masse and take control (and not just to speak English or irrigate their land like the Peace Corps had intended).

"You see," Robinson Parker once told a psychiatrist, "I took all those stories Dad told me to heart."

The first time Robinson Parker tried to kill himself he was eight years old, and he tried to throw himself out of the top floor window of his family's lodge on Lake Geneva. That would have done it. But his mother grabbed him as

he was about to fling himself out and got him a psychiatrist. He told the psychiatrist: "Daddy said how lucky we were to have all this (meaning the big house, the servants, etc.) with the communists throwing little children out of windows in Budapest."

The psychiatrist replied: "Uh huh." It was the beginning of a long relationship.

The first week of Robinson Parker's stint for the Peace Corps, a mine caved in in that mountain village, trapping twenty workers.

"I was standing not far from the entrance as a curious crowd gathered, and the police and a few of the company's lesser officials organized a rescue effort," he started to explain.

"The nearest health clinic had sent in its one and only van, filled with U.S. medical supplies. Before it came to a full stop, a bunch of spectators broke through the barriers set up around the mine and tore open the truck's doors. They looted the contents like experts and scattered in all directions."

Robinson Parker asked a cop what was going on. "Are they looking for morphine?"

"No. Penicillin," replied the cop. "It brings a higher price on the underground market." (Joke?)

Since no one was brought out of that cave-in alive, the supplies weren't needed anyway.

The second time Robinson Parker tried to kill himself he was eleven years old and tried to drown himself at summer camp after losing a canoe race to a girl. "It didn't work. Too much natural bouyancy," he told a brand new psychiatrist years later. "No matter how hard I fought my way to the bottom, I just kept rising back up again."

During his first couple of months in the Peace Corps, Robinson Parker spent a great deal of his free time out in the fields. He talked radical politics to the tenant farmers and stoop laborers, mostly about there being strength in numbers and having right (with a capital R) on their side.

When he finished talking to them each day, his back and knees were killing him from bending down to their level. "They listened without comment and never stopped working long

enough to look at me. At first I didn't even know if they understood what I was saying," he said.

Then he got a great idea. He bought a guitar—he could play chords well enough—and took it with him to the fields. "I taught those workers every protest song I could think of." After all, back home it was still the golden age of the hootenanny.

He translated what he could into their own language, but not being really good at getting the rhymes to come out at the end, he settled on teaching them most of the songs phonetically in English.

"After a short while, they were singing along as if I were Peter Seeger," said Robinson Parker. "I was able to get their attention and hold it long enough to add some political comments of my own between songs, too."

The workers, of course, weren't the only ones who heard, he knew. When the wind was blowing in the right direction, some of the "vested interests"—especially the plantation overseers, sitting protected in the shade—got an earful as the strains of discontent drifted up and across those amber fields.

His first love at 15 years old was someone nice, though fighting a losing battle against pimples and fly-away hair. When she turned down his offer of a lifetime of romance, he drank a quart of gin straight down, passed out and had to be hospitalized. It was touch and go for several hours.

Robinson Parker admitted to the psychiatrist they got him this time that he couldn't cope with disappointment. The psychiatrist said: "Really."

Robinson Parker had sex with a few local ladies during his brief tour of duty. The Peace Corps had expressed no official opinion on the wisdom of such activity, except for vague references to exotic and permanently debilitating diseases that could be easily contracted by white American boys.

He had sex with the first pretty girl whose teeth weren't rotting and who didn't have any visible sores—qualities not easy to find.

He told another psychiatrist, after he got back home, he had had a good time in bed. But wouldn't you know it, an unpleasant fungus appeared in the

general vicinity of his genitals.

The doctor at the only health clinic in 500 miles said at the time: "It's not so bad." He gave him some purple stuff (paid-in-full by Uncle Sam) to smear on, and promised that in a few weeks he'd be as good as new. He was. But the incident did throw a wet blanket over his social life.

The best thing anyone could say about Robinson Parker's mental history was that the hospitals and shrinks kept such spotty records he and his ritzy family never had to worry about the social stigma and all that. In addition, although he tried to do himself in quite often, you'd never know it to look at him.

"I was diagnosed as a lot of different things over the years," he once told a new psychiatrist. Later on, that psychiatrist diagnosed him the same as one of the earlier ones did. This indicated to Robinson Parker that the medical establishment had run out of new ideas and the old ones were being dredged up, dusted off, and recycled.

He spent a lot of his free evenings in that backward village's only bar and grill. Here he talked of revolution with the emerging-nation equivalent of "good ol' boys" and drank the local brew.

He knew instinctively these fellows were the ones most likely to lean on their shovels and yawn in the face of the bosses, sneer at, or just ignore, a foreman's efforts to get them to put their noses to the grindstone. "They had lots of kids and sometimes lots of wives," said Robinson Parker, "but they never paid any attention to them."

These fellows were quick to accept the drinks bought them and, in exchange, listened to what Robinson Parker had to say.

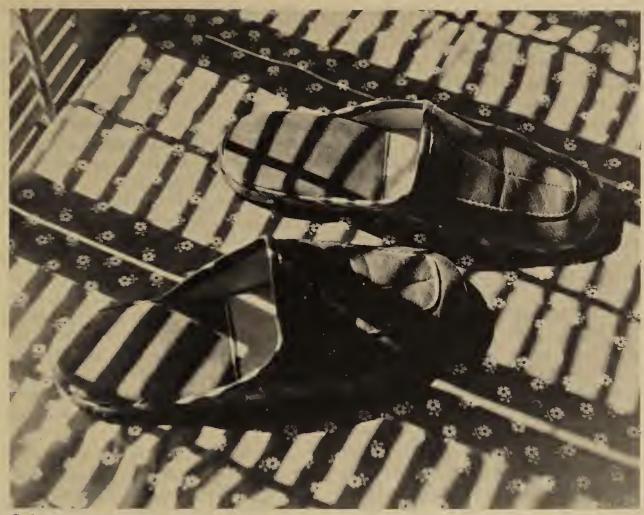
One night he said: "You are the dupes of the system. You must rise up and fight."

They replied: "You are right. We are with you."

Then they all got very drunk.

Later that evening Robinson Parker passed out. The men he had been drinking with left him crumpled on the spot where he fell to sleep it off. Early the next morning, he went home with a hangover.

The hangover was all he had. His apartment had been broken into and ransacked sometime during the previous evening. Everything from Hershey bars from home (no joke) to his portable record player were gone.



John Bolinger

He was sure that this was a harassment tactic. He said: "The powers that existed in that poverty-infested place—the patroons, the overlords, the lackies fronting for corporate America—knew I was stirring up trouble and had decided after only a few months to try to make me miserable enough to go home, or at least somewhere else."

To make matters worse, the men he had gotten friendly with and drunk with only the night before avoided him like the plague. "They are frightened," Robinson Parker said to himself. "Someone has gotten to them."

As the days wore on, it looked even more like some invisible big brother was out to get him. One day not too long after the police promised to "look into" the theft of his belongings, Robinson Parker received a neatly typed letter from a superior back home. It read in part: "... after careful evaluation, your tour of duty as a representative of the United States is being terminated immediately. ..."

Of course, as the wheels of government grind exceedingly slow, he was on the job several more months.

During the remainder of his stay, he grew more and more paranoid, sidestepping anyone in a uniform or with clean fingernails. He continued to try to get the poor folk—the farmers and miners—to band together and do something about their miserable lives. But although some listened politely, most walked away, and no one paid any attention.

Robinson Parker said to himself he understood their fear. They had families to take care of, and living in squalor was better than living in prison, or not living at all. But the truth was, his feelings were hurt.

Many years and psychiatrists later, when the newspapers filled up with stories about Peace Corps and VISTA volunteers being held hostage, and revolutionaries blowing up everything in sight, he told whoever would listen: "I saw it coming."

But he really hadn't. Once, in a rare show of rage, he told a psychiatrist: "They took our weapons, our money, our help and gave us s---."

"Not a very original assessment of the world situation," said one psychiatrist.

"What would you know about it?" said Robinson Parker. Then he shut up.

A short time before he was to head home, Robinson Parker got a surprise.

He was passing by a lean-to shack, the home of one of the guys he had been drinking with the last night anyone was friendly to him. He could hear a combination of music and static.

He looked in through a wide open doorway.

Inside, on a table, was a portable radio that appeared to be exactly like one that had been stolen from him.

And it sounded like the batteries were running down.

Strangely enough, Robinson Parker's first reaction was embarrassment, as if he had peeked into a community toilet and saw someone doing his business. He averted his eyes and hurried away.

A week later he saw his wristwatch (how many Timexes could there be 2,500 miles from the nearest Woolworth's?) on the wrist of another of his "drinking buddies." The man nodded slowly in his direction as if he wanted him to know where he stood, and walked on. Robinson Parker did nothing. But he wished he were dead.

"That's life," shrugged one of the local plantation overseers, a strongarm, who seemed to know the whole story. He was the only person who acknowledged Robinson Parker's departure, waving casually as he drove off in his two-year-old cadillac while Robinson Parker boarded the bus that would take him to a final debriefing and medical checkup. (The Peace Corps told him not to bring home anything catching.)

The bus was crowded that day. "I was able to wedge myself into a seat," he said, "but I still had to lean back to brace myself against the bumpy ride down the mountainside." The one-

story cinderblock clinic was a bastion of civilization amid a rain forest full of snakes and really large beetles.

It was hot. More than the crowd, the weight of the records and personal stuff piled on his lap made Robinson Parker feel closed in. He needed it all in order to be processed out of the country with a clean, or at least passable, bill of health.

The drive was about one-half hour long, and the heat made Robinson Parker drowsy. He was just starting to doze when, from out of nowhere, a scruffy-looking boy about ten or eleven years old squeezed his way through the crowded aisle and grabbed all of Robinson Parker's belongings out of his relaxed grip. The boy then darted to the front of the bus, pushed the door, and ran out just as it slowed in approaching a regular stop. Nobody made a move to stop him.

Initially stunned by the ballet-like motions with which the boy executed the theft, Robinson Parker got angry. This lasted only seconds; then a mad smile creeped up on his face and turned into out-loud laughter.

The other passengers and the driver—who had made no attempt to block the boy's exit—tried to ignore him. The ones closest instinctively started to inch away.

When Robinson Parker finally got home, he was never a normal, regular guy. (Fortunately, his family money—even allowing for runaway inflation—will keep him comfortably under surveillance until the year 2047 when he will be a hundred years old. If he lives, of course.)

The boy had gotten away with Robinson Parker's worn-out raincoat, file folders containing all his medical records (shots all, allergies all), a bag with a tuna sandwich in it, and an old coffee can, sealed with a piece of plastic bag and a rubber band. The last contained what the clinic needed to check on any parasites Robinson Parker might have picked up during his tour of duty. It was, naturally, a stool specimen: a can of s---.

He has tried to kill himself several more times to date since leaving the Peace Corps. He isn't too good at it because he hasn't succeeded, but the army of shrinks on retainer can't get him to give up trying.

Robinson Parker, of course, did not get to see the cannister being opened, nor the expression on the young thief's face when he examined his loot. But in the years ahead, thinking about it was the one thing that always made him feel better.

Susan Silverstein New York, New York



Weeping Willow

In beautiful disordered symmetry it grew— Our friendship—and the willow, now so tall. We spoke of simple and complex matters Across the garden wall.

Now in this black and white winter, with grays in between, I hear no more your voice or laughter.
I turn to my window instead, to pensively stare
At the faithful willow—weeping there

Forever restless, never still—
The wind stirs its tendrils of long yellow hair,
While the snow lies so cold on your grave.

Sue Romesburg East Chicago, Indiana

Sea Bride

As tumultous winds whip brine into curling, foamy peaks, the ship rocks upon rough waters, bow erect, riding the crests and ploughing deep troughs.

With each swell, it dips and rolls as the boiling sea rises, then falls beneath. Spiraling aquatic arms draw it, submerged in wet caress, down to swirling embrace.

Moans seized by shrieking wind blend and are flung into churning waves to drown as the hull now sinks, now surges through endless whirlpools.

Joined by tempestuous force, nautical marriage of ship and sea engulfed in motion, the gale subsides. Shuddering mightily, the vessel settles empty, rudderless, to drift, kissed by lingering spray.

White caps appear, then diminish. Wind sighs, tranquil and cool, to lull upon a calmer surface while life-giving currents ebb and flow in quickening tide, rippling toward new shore.

Lynn Roberts Huntsville, Alabama

Stardust

The Rock

the rock had three suns to spin around.

it spun with grace. it danced with grace. it fell with grace.

then it burned and basked in the hottest flame and was liquid. and the shadow of the rock was gone.

David B. Porter Hammond, Indiana

The Adults Next Door

What was it about Mrs. K's husband did he bring home presents chocolates and lace on sober - every other days did he whisper sweet words that could echo late into the night when he was on his way home to slap her around why did she stay was the overpowering emotion fear or love my mother slept with the front door unlocked in case she wanted to talk she believed it was love I slept with my bedroom door barricaded and cursing his name I believed it was fear

Laura Johnson Gary, Indiana Charles

B.

Tinkham

april is feather-light delicate as birdshell a tentative first warmth like the first shy love of a girl with gold-brown hair

live as a wren
she knows
the pale green
shoots of grass,
the soft magnolia
skies of dusk,
the winsome
lilac-blue
of star

her speaking is a silence that rides between the notes of whippoorwill night comes
soft upon us:
the katydid,
green fiddler
in the buckthorn,
sounds out
the phases
of the moon,
and cricket
shyly tells
of rain to come:

far off,
in echo
of the oak,
the owl
spells out
the darker corners
of the hour:
the nightmare
of the shrinking mouse,
the burrow
of the mole

overhead,
lighter than
the silence
of heaven's tree,
the firefly
glows gold and silver,
a little moving star
to keep us
company

Blue Flag

(In LaPorte County, in February of 1831, Mrs. Mary Garroute, after visiting a sick friend, died in a snowstorn on her return home—Timothy Ball)

In the distance
A figure in luminous blue
Gleams through
The snow—
Snow filling
Homeless, deep hollows
Of land:

The wind rises,
Then falls, with
Curious indifference, a
Dark wailing
That rides
White whirlwinds
Of time: the figure
In blue,
As frail as the violet
Is frail,
Is gone:

Beyond this wind,
Here on the prairie
In spring, long grasses
Will grow, blossoms
Will blow—blue flag
And jewelweed and phlox—
Here on this prairie
In spring.

Spider

You, my beloved, are a spider.

If ever a spider could be beautiful, you are that spider,

Sitting lovely and innocent, in the middle of your invisible web,

Spinning with clear eyes and sweet smile your lies and deceits,

Embroidering, knitting the delicate and diaphanous silk of the fabric,

Enjoying the beauty of the process and the creation.

I am a moth
Caught in a web I do not even see,
Unable to believe such beauty and innocence can hurt me,
Yet knowing, surely, that
Spiders kill.

Phyllis J. Day West Lafayette, Indiana

Passes

Your fingers smooth me from brow to neck, long slow strokes steady as a tongue lapping fur quiet as violets your hand makes gentle passes at my resolve. Long slow strokes

float light blue comfort into troubled spaces. If your lips won't form the words I'll listen strand by strand to the more tender murmurs of your fingers through my hair.

Karen Roberts Hammond, Indiana

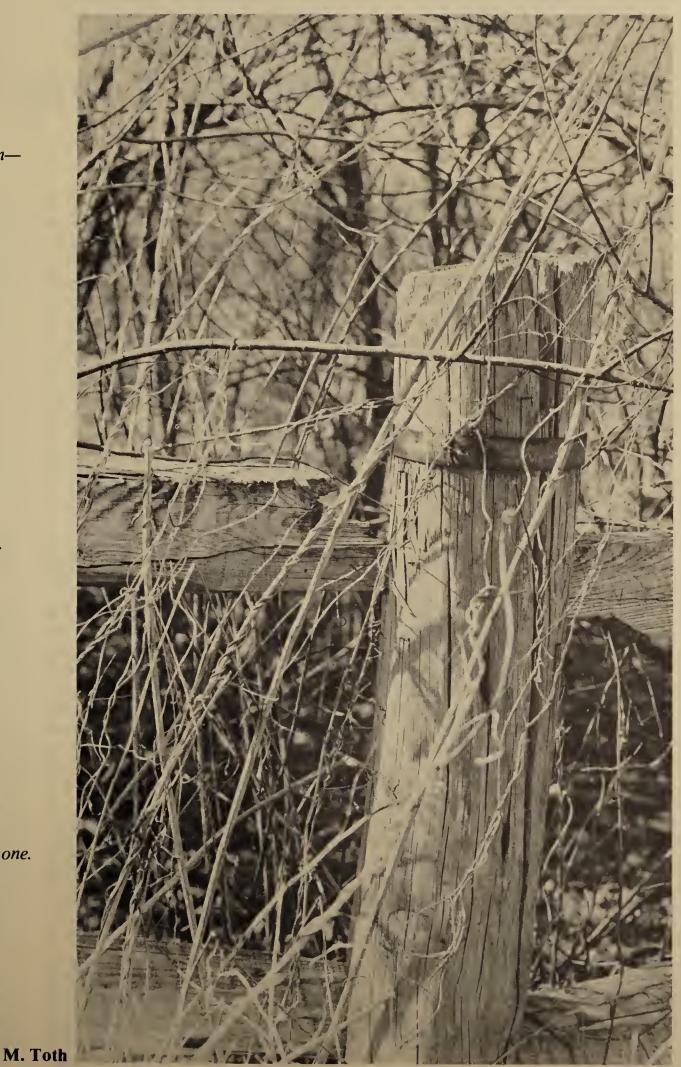
Hand Shadow

You left your handprint On the kitchen wall One day—I don't know exactly when— A print Made of mud from the garden Or of grease from the car Or of dust from under the bed— Made from the unknown And left enduring On the kitchen wall.

I never noticed it Until quite some time after you left. It was A curious discovery: I stared at it, loved it, hated it, Matched it to my own hand, Agonized over it-Then I turned the light off And then on And then off and on To see if it would disappear As easily as the one who put it there. But it stayed, Determined to be permanent.

At night While I sleep That handprint Slides off the wall And slips into bed with me. It feels my forehead In the fever of nightmares It strokes my hair In consolation It pulls the blanket Up around my shoulders And holds my hand until dawn. It is the shadow of your hand long gone. It is the guilty conscience Of the hand That would not stay To comfort me.

Debbie Lucas Hammond, Indiana



The Solid Copper Cow Bell

Semi-insanity struck while I was lying in a hospital bed, reading Charlotte Armstrong's The Gift Shop. Since I couldn't leave my bed for thirty-five days, I found it difficult to occupy the time. I had watched three layers of skin grow back on my elbows from the abrasive treatment they had received from the rough sheets; I had built up two inches of nail enamel on my toenails, and counted my gray hairs. There wasn't much left, except my books and my fevered mind. The Gift Shop is a mystery, as is the reason for my getting my harebrained idea from that book. I really believe it was the cute little illustration on the front cover that did it.

When I was released from the hospital, I left behind the oxygen mask, the electric bed that wouldn't work, and enough blood to replenish the blood banks of northern Indiana. The nail enamel was used up; I left the empty bottle. However, I took with me the *idea* that had begun to unfold in my mind like a time-lapse picture of the opening of a Venus fly trap.

By the time I had made my second visit for EKG's, more blood tests, and the "show and tell" session with my doctor, I was becoming restless and more than ready to start on my harebrained scheme. My doctor was well pleased with my progress, so he gave me the go-ahead sign to proceed with my plans. He did, however, admonish me not to take on anything that was going to be too much of a hassle. Little did I know at that time just what kind of hassles I would experience.

Now I was ready to give birth to my H.B.S. (harebrained scheme). I had the name all picked out for my place (the suspense by now is probably caus-

ing your legs to jerk, your nose to twitch and your eyes to water); it was to be an antique and gift shop. Since my name is Sue, I thought it would be okay to fudge a little bit, so I called the shop Suzanne's Antique and Gift Shop. Cute? . . . Catchy? Believe me, this was an important breakthrough. Somehow though, I managed to overlook a few small details, such as location, a retail merchant's license, and a source to obtain my merchandise.

Of course with my ingenuity, these small obstacles were soon overcome, and then the real fun began; because for my antiques, I *naturally* bought an "antique" building.

On an unseasonably (or maybe unreasonably is a better word) cold November day, I went to the gas and electric company to have my utilities turned on. I went to the water company to have the water turned on. I had a telephone installed and business cards and stationery printed in large quantities ("It's cheaper" at the local printer's). I dressed in some old grubby clothes that were too good to throw away, but not good enough to be caught dead in, and went back to my store to paint, clean, and put up some shelves.

As I was dressing for the occasion, I figured by now the heat would be starting to flow into that "antique" building. It would be really nice and cozy-warm by the time I arrived there. Just think! A place all my own. I'd be my own boss.

When I opened the front door with its somewhat amateurish (but cute) sign hanging on it, saying WATCH FOR GRAND OPENING DECEMBER 16, I felt a little glow of pride inside, until—until I saw the water all over the

floor! It seems that when all that cozy warmth began to ooze out of the radiators, it caused the ice in the pipes to turn to water once again. (I would like to interject here that the pipes were also antique and full of holes.)

All the kinks (except the ones in my back) were finally worked out to my satisfaction. Before I had time to stand back and view my handiwork, opening day had arrived.

I had studied diligently all the books and periodicals I could find to be prepared with at least a smattering of knowledge about nearly all types of antiques and primitives. Actually, at the time, the most desirable and salable merchandise was depression glass, old humped-back trunks, curved-glass china cabints, and potbellied stoves. So with this storehouse of knowledge, I had picked up about ten of these items and several more so I presumed I was well armed. My OPEN FOR BUSINESS, CLOSED, PLEASE CALL AGAIN sign was turned streetside to read OPEN FOR BUSINESS, and I unlocked the door to my first customers right on schedule at 10:00 A.M.

I swung the door wide, and though I was terrified, I plastered a confident grin on my face and said, "Hello. Please come in and feel free to look around. If you need any assistance, I'll be right here. There's fresh coffee on the table in back by my desk. Please help yourself."

I had barely finished this well-rehearsed speech when the bell I had hung above my door fell on a customer's head. As he sank to his knees, I remember thinking I might have my grand opening and closing on the same day. I rushed to the aid of my

customer to see if he might need stitches in his head. You see, the bell was a cow bell, a solid copper cow bell. I gave him coffee and had him sit in a lovely old wicker rocker. He looked so in character with his wire-framed glasses and benign smile that a passerby could have mistaken him for part of the trappings. You just never know.

My second customer was, however, out of character. I think it would be safe to say she was a character. To my way of thinking, she would have been more at home in the bargain basement of some department store looking at Mother Hubbards or cobbler aprons. She was around four feet, nine inches tall. She had a black scarf tied around her head peasant-style. She also wore men's argyle socks and "good serviceable oxfords". She had a trace of a mustache, about one-eighth of an inch long.

"Hey!" she bellowed. "You got any o' that Irish Belleek? I don't mean the junk they make here in the states, either. It's not worth botherin' with."

Boy! That one took me by surprise. What the hell was Belleek, I wondered. I knew it was some kind of china or procelain, but what kind? I decided to try and fake it out.

I said, "Gee, I'm sorry. I don't have any on hand right now. Why don't you bring in a sample piece of the pattern you're collecting, and I'll be on the lookout for it."

"Say, hon, that's real swell of you. While I'm here, I think I'll buy that Heisey glass pitcher you got over there on that shelf," she said.

So there was my first sale. I was really on my way to fame and fortune. The pitcher sold for twenty-six dollars. I put twenty-five in the little brass antique cash register, and the one dollar I framed and hung on my wall. You just never know.

Well, I managed to muddle through the rest of the day without any more serious mishaps and even made quite a few good sales. I locked the door at 9:00 P.M., a tired but wiser me, vowing to do better tomorrow.

Tomorrow brought the sun, optimism, and a truck driver. I had ordered a large shipment of glassware when I attended the Gift and Housewares Show at McCormick Place in Chicago. The aforementioned truck driver arrived with this glassware at 10:30 A.M. He was around six feet, two inches tall, with about a forty-inch chest and maybe a twenty-nine inch waist. He was about twenty-five years old. He ambled in with his truck-



Summer in the desert brought me down.
Sand storms,
Heat and
Scorpions,

Cut me,
Burned me,
Stung my soul.

Left me,

torn and tired
at the foot of a giant saguaro.
"Sentinel of the Desert."
Protector to the frightened.
Advisor to the lost.
Keeper of sandy secrets.
Its twisted arms suggesting
Four new directions I might try.
I chose instead a fifth.
A Greyhound
Heading home.

Evelyn Lazzell Hammond, Indiana

driver-type combination shuffle and swagger.

"Hey, lady, I got a load for you. Tailgate delivery, you know," he said. "What do you mean by tailgate

delivery?" I asked, and was instantly sorry.

"That means you gotta unload it yourself from the tailgate of the truck. We got that in our contract now. We don't have to bring nothin' in no stores no more," he answered.

I decided to humor him, so I went out to the truck and walked up to the tailgate. Now, I am not a tall woman. My forehead just grazed the tailgate, and my eyes focused on the axle of the truck. I guess I must have looked pretty silly and pitiful because he started laughing and said, "Heck, you are a little runt. I guess I can bend the rules a little bit this one time." He not only unloaded the cartons but also brought them all the way to the back of the store and stacked them neatly so that they would be easy for me to open. It's amazing what a "helpless" female can

get done when she tries. You just never know.

Days became weeks, weeks months, and in what seemed like a short while in some ways and an eternity in others, I was bringing to a close my third year as a business woman.

There were good times in those three years when I felt it was all quite worthwhile. And then there were the other kinds of days, the kind that make you talk to yourself, repeating over and over, "This is only a test. It is not an actual alert."

I usually have quite a lot of spunk. I'm not too easily brought down to a quivering mass. But before you judge, let me tell you of the "Intimidator." This is the name I have given my antagonist, because from the minute she walked through my door, I felt I had met the enemy with fixed bayonets.

She was one of those "look at me, I'm a doll" types. She was in her late twenties or early thirties (a few years younger than me), had that kind of fresh-as-dew look from the cosmetic

bottles that guarantee this, and windblown hair. She was wearing a miniskirt, go-go boots, and a kittenish looking fake fur jacket. Naturally, I was wearing old slacks and a pink smock with "Susanne's" emblazoned on the yoke. That alone was enough to put me on the defensive.

"Intimidator" was looking for an antique mantel-clock to place above her fireplace. I showed her all the clocks I had, and she finally settled on a ninety-three year old Seth Thomas that was in pretty fine shape for its age.

"How much for this one?" she asked coyly.

Somehow I could feel one of those "is that the best you can do" bouts coming on, but I managed to keep my cool and smile sweetly as I said, "The price tag is inside the glass door here. Let's see." I opened the front of the clock and showed her the tag with \$125.00 written on it.

She gave me one of those pursed-lip smiles, the kind that hardly ever get past the corners of the mouth, and looked me squarely in the eyes without so much as blinking. With what I later determined was just a hint of scorn, she asked, "Is that the best you can do?"

Since it is almost standard procedure to haggle with an antique dealer, I learned early to mark my prices higher than what I needed for a safe margin of profit. So we haggled—for twenty minutes. She finally got the clock for \$95.00 and a promise that I'd have a key for it in three or four days. I gave her a sort of makeshift key to use until then.

"Now, you're sure this clock will keep running when I get it home?" she asked.

"If it is on a level surface and not jarred too much, you should have no problems with it. I don't sell any clocks that won't run. I don't know how to repair them, so I dispose of them at auctions where a lot of clockmakers buy them for spare parts. However, I can't guarantee a ninety-three year old clock. You can see it's running, and it has been cleaned."

"Well, that sounds fair enough, I'll take it."

I packed it in a large carton with a lot of packing material and explained just what she should do with it when she got it home (i.e. I told her how to put the pendulum back on). I told her I'd call her in a few days when I got the new key for her.

Two days later, she called *me*, to inform me that the clock was "a bummer

and didn't keep good time." I reminded her of the age of the clock and the fact that I hadn't guaranteed it to do so. She became very irate and threatened me with everything but bodily harm. I'd had enough of her, so I told her I would take the clock back and give her a refund. She informed me that her husband was a policeman, and she would send him in. So what could he do? Arrest me for undue courtesy?

"Intimidator's" husband came in three days later, and, sure enough, he was a policeman. But a very pleasant and agreeable one.

"I understand my wife was rather nasty about the clock she bought from you," he said. "I'd like to tell you there's nothing wrong with it."

"Well, she told me it wouldn't keep good time. I offered to take it back and give her a refund. Did you bring it with you?"

"No, I intend to keep it. It was a real bargain at that price. It has only lost one minute in the five days we had it. I just love it. I only came in to pay you for the key if you have it now."

I did have the key in my desk drawer, so I handed it to him with a grateful smile and said, "No charge."

He said, "Gee, you're a nice lady. I'll send my buddies from the police force in. A lot of them buy antiques."

You just never know.

My fourth Christmas season was rapidly approaching. Only four more days, followed by a couple days of rest, then I had to prepare for my annual January Clearance Sale. I was going full steam, but my psychological and physical boilers were running out of fuel. The longer holiday hours coupled with the problems of my personal life were beginning to show on me. I noticed my tread was slower as I trudged through the crunching snow on this particular December day. The sun was shining and threw back tiny mirror reflections into my eyes. I supposed the world was all right. My pensive mood was probably just due to tiredness.

The morning hours weren't too busy, so as I worked, I ruminated over the past year. There had been some hectic times, but all told, it had been a good and profitable year. The bills were all paid at least, and business was good. There was money in the till and plans in my head. Next year I'd expand. I had a large building, and it wasn't being used to its full capacity.

Around two o'clock in the afternoon, a man came in who was looking for a set of bookends.

"Did you have any particular kind in



mind?" I asked.

"No," he answered tersely.

Strange, I thought. But then, some people are just not talkative.

"Would you like me to show you where they are, and then if you see something you like, you can let me know?"

"No. You pick 'em out."

As I walked to where the bookends were displayed, I noticed he stayed behind me all the time. I felt a vague prickling between my shoulder blades, but shrugged it off.



M. Toth

"Here's a nice pair of old bronze ships, or is that too masculine? Perhaps they're for a lady."

"No, those will be fine. Just put 'em in a bag."

"Okay, but I'd be glad to gift wrap them for you. I have boxes, paper, and bows. There's no charge." This was over my shoulder as I walked to the counter, he still following closely behind. As I rounded the corner by the cash register, I set the bookends down on the counter and reached underneath for a bag. "Never mind those bookends. Just open the register and put all the money in that bag you have there."

I kind of chuckled and made the ridiculous remark, "You've got to be kidding." My laughter died agonizingly in my throat as I looked into his face and noted that his features had set like concrete. My eyes wandered slowly downward to his hand. Sure enough, he wasn't kidding. He had the biggest pistol I'd ever seen (of course, I'd never looked into the end of one before) pointed smack dab in the

center of my chest. I *think* that's where my heart was. At least *something* was in there beating out a syncopated tattoo on my rib cage.

It's amazing what silly thoughts can run through your mind when you're rattled. I remember I was going to ask him if he wanted me to make the bag double, because I had a lot of rolled coins and thought they might fall through the bottom. He was in a hurry though, and he kept waving that gun around, so I just stuffed the cash in a bag and handed it to him—very carefully.

He asked if that was all the money I had. Believe me. If the Actors' Guild had seen my performance, I would now be the proud owner of an Oscar.

"Oh sir!" I said, with a tremor in my voice, and small tears welling in my eyes. "That's every penny I have to my name."

"Okay then. Hurry up now. What's that door behind you lead to?"

"Just the bathroom. Please don't make me go in there."

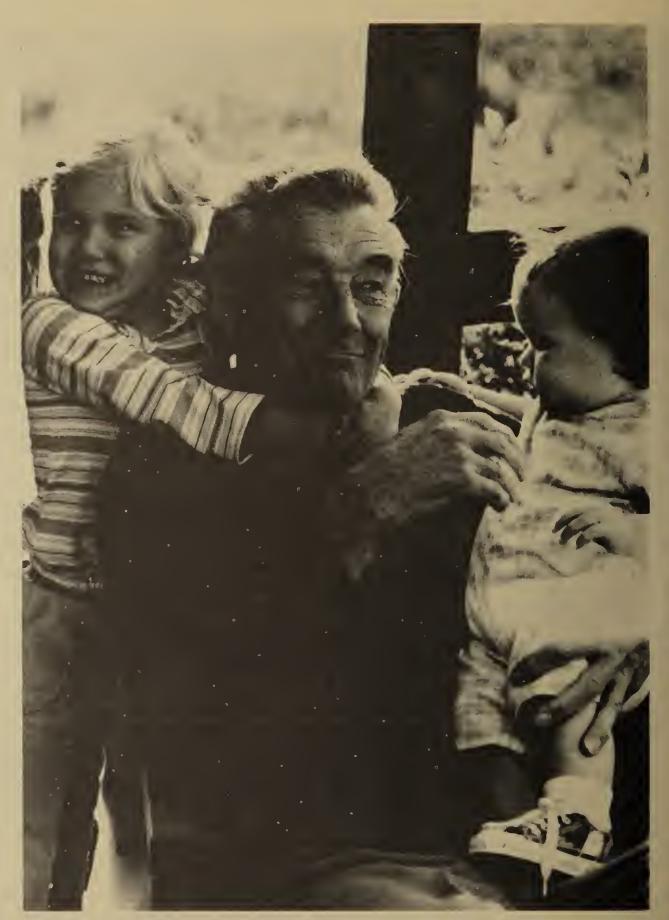
"Get in there quick, and make sure you close the door tight. Right now!" "Yessir," very timidly.

I stood as though mesmerized, with my palms flat against the door, expecting a shot to come splintering through at any moment. You see, I lied to him. There was over \$200.00 in my purse, which was sitting on the floor right by the cash register. He must have been nearly as frightened of being caught as I was of being shot, because he overlooked it in his haste.

Finally I heard my beloved cow bell jingle its happy tune as the door was opened and then closed. Then silence. I knew he must be gone. Oh my! If it weren't for the cow bell, I might still be in that bathroom. You just never now.

The FOR SALE sign went up in January. I sold the building in three weeks and had a giant clearance sale. By the middle of March, I had liquidated all my stock and was locking the door for the last time. Suddenly I felt that nagging "what am I forgetting" sensation. I unlocked the door again and climbed up onto the window seat beside the front door. I tenderly reached out and unhooked my solid copper cow bell. You just never know.

Sue Romesburg East Chicago, Indiana



John Bolinger

Blossoms of Family

I've fathered you;
I've joyed your tries
And trued your lies from near

I've fathered you;
I've feared your hopes
And the tethered ropes of here.

I've fathered you, and you've womaned Into blossoms of family.

Now in my childness You mother me, daughterfully.

Larry Pinerski Crown Point, Indiana

Antidote to City Life

City-diseased dwellers, leading automated lives, directed by red and green traffic lights in a stop-and-go world of timeclocks, telephoned appointments, and computerized everythings, seek solace in Bloody Mary business lunches early morning golf outings, and all-evening television programs, crowning psychiatrists kings over their fast-paced lives, when all that is needed is a shot-in-the-arm of Upper Peninsula Michigan.

God's Country, we call it. The land of blue water, where islands lay placid beneath the sun, basking in its warmth much the same way as do the easy-going St. Ignace natives nestled in the arms of spruce, pine and cedar on the sandy Lake Michigan beaches; where the Mackinac Bridge towers majestically above the Straits, smiling into the red-eyed sunsets, in tune to the sharp cry of the gull swooping down to rest on the rolling shoulders of Huron and Michigan, listening to the low voices of freighters clearing their throats as they pass through the Straits.

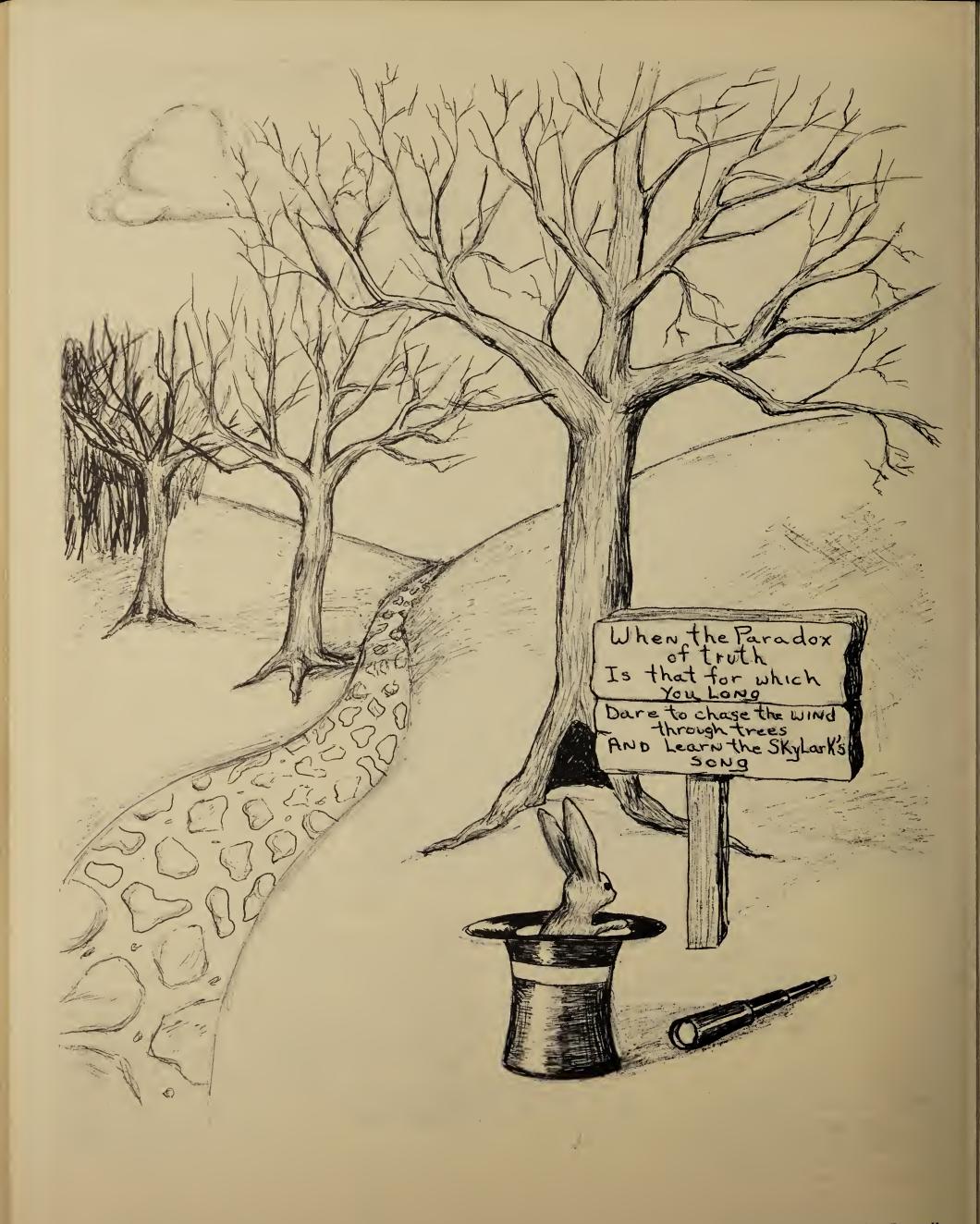
Mackinac Island
beckons to her shores the
virgin-white sailboats and
ferries that
stud the diamond waters.
Reeling in like bass on the
hooks of the native fishermen's lines,
the tourist-laden vessels
drop their camera-clutching cargo
into thick creamy fudged air,
onto streets busy with bicycles and
horse drawn carriages.

June lilacs perfume the non-polluted northern air, while June blackflies and mosquitoes persecute fishermen out for trout.

Michigan meadows
painted red by the
Indian paintbrush,
blue with forget-me-nots,
dancing wildly with the
white daisy,
teasingly tickle the
browned summer legs of
little boys
hunting for
gartersnakes.

The northern woods, richly green with every green, lined with the sturdy white birch, bristled with the needles of the spruce, pine and ambling porcupine, carpeted with the forest fern, warmed with the eyes of the gentle white-tailed deer, nurtures natives not too caught up in too much of anything, except the respect and love of their Upper Peninsula Michigan.

Christine Ney Nilson Riverdale, Illinois



Stardust

Oh, polar star, if you could but direct my course, I'd ride your icy chariot across diamond galaxies through centuries of milky mists on to eternal fire that burns away this earthly mantle and sears to the core.

Then, inspire me,
moulten and pliant,
with highlights of
life envisioned, only
heretofore dreamed.
Lifted from this leaden sphere,
from these melted chains
of gravity's pull,
unshackled now, uneclipsed.

Yet aloof and silent, coldly winking at mortal transgressions, you glance down briefly at humid desires before moving onward in a cosmic sea, bursting free in a swirling kaleidoscope of volcanic sparks and celestial dust, showering upon mortal ash the chilled cinders of an indifferent compass.

Lynn Roberts Huntsville, Alabama

Gifts for All

The miracles of creation are not honored by us. Unbelievers, we lord it over our domestic servants, cat, dog, horse with the brass knuckles of authority, an arrogance swollen by the servility of its captives. Given time we will mark for destruction the polar bear, the whale, seals, eagles, provide a hemlock cup for rabbits, and mice and coyotes, breathe with a deadly breath on the little household dwellers, spiders, ants, moths, all beloved of God since He made them. . . then. . . then. . . we nations can send lethal toys to each other.

James Hearst Cedar Falls, Iowa

The Changeling

The meta morphosis is brutal. Difficult facing realities, un earthing truths even the sub conscious recoils from. Naked in the sunlight of full realization, the cat erpillar, disgusted at its own appearance spins a cocoon to hide himself. There he hibernates meditates, twisting the shameful into the pure, mellowing the bitter gall into new sweet nectar. Then, after the seed of determination has born its ultimate fruit, he emerges—

Changeling.

Bobbie Grams Angola, Indiana

The

Winter Scene

From my bedroom window I see Pines wearing icy dresses. Lovely, coniferous ladies Off to a ball, Will you waltz, or Will you fall?

Irene Sedeora Morton, Illinois





"I caught them just in time. Zin had found a rabbit lying in the street. La was boiling it for dinner."

"Oh, ick! Why would they do that?"

"They'll probably eat anything."

"They've been here for a year. You'd think they'd eat like the rest of us.''

The women peered into the church's refugee box.

"Look at the beautiful teapot someone donated."

"Who'd want to give that away? It's almost too good."

"It's prettier than mine."

"Why don't you swap?"

"Nahh. What if the person who donated it came to my house and saw it?''

"So what? You've spent a year helping them. What's one teapot?"

"Mine's good enough. I suppose they'd never know the difference."

"Take it. It's not good to overdo charity. Pretty soon they'll expect it."

"That's for sure. But it's hard to know what to do. Zin is doing okay. His last report card was good except for penmanship. But La. . . . "

"I think she even stopped wearing a bra again."

"Brother, a Cambodian woman's libber."

"She's pretty big."

"Yes, I was surprised. When she and Zin came, they sure didn't look like those newspaper pictures of starving refugees."

"They were supposed to be cultivated Cambodians. I thought La would be refined and educated, but I wonder if we'll ever teach her everything she needs to know."

"At least she speaks good English."

"Yes, but she learned that before she came. Anyone who eats dead rabbits off the street is still pretty backward."

"That's for sure."

"They take some getting used to."

"They're really mysterious."

"By the way, did you ever find out what's in that wooden box she keeps on her nightstand?"

Sculptors

1981 Sigrid Stark Award Winner

"No, it's locked. I tried opening it once when she was in the bathroom. I think she keeps the key to it on that ribbon around her neck."

"What do you think is in there?"

"She says 'just trinkets."

"Well, if it's only trinkets, why is she so secretive?"

"Must be something we wouldn't approve of."

"Well, maybe it's just private. We shouldn't snoop."

"We're definitely not snoops. It's for her own good."

"It sure is a strange culture. That's probably why they had a war there. Just too many people. I suppose it was God's way of getting rid of them."

"I imagine someday we'll look back on all we did and realize we helped mold new lives, but right now I don't know. I get so discouraged. . . . eating a rabbit off the street. . . ."

"I hear they eat anything that moves—snakes, rats, even fish eyes."

"No wonder their mentality is so low."

"At least La and Zin come to church regularly."

"Just think, they used to be Buddhists. You wonder how people could believe in one of those fat gods with a big bare belly and all those extra arms."

"Ignorance, I guess."

The rabbit was pivotal for La, and the incident brought about a growing disenchantment.

The meat on the animal was still edible. The car had grazed only its head and a front foot. Zin, who observed the accident, quickly picked up the rabbit and dashed home with it.

"Look, Mother, we can have rabbit for supper!" He flopped the rabbit on the table.

"What happened to it?"

"A car hit it just now. Can we eat it?"

La appraised the animal skeptically. Zin, eight years old and suddenly breadwinner, looked up at her anxiously. His eyes sought approval.

Their eyes met. She smiled. "I think you've just brought in a good meal, Zin. Get some old newspapers."

Her deft hands stripped the skin from the animal. Nimble fingers slid inside the slick and glistening carcass and removed its entrails. When the meat was clean, La sauteed shallots in garlic and butter until they simmered soft and yellow. Then she added coriander, curry powder and coconut milk. The rabbit was stewing in the sauce when the church woman stepped inside. She lifted the lid and sniffed.

Zin, proud and naive, declared, "I found a rabbit."

"Oh, nice, Zin. Where is it?"

La motioned silence too late.

"In that pot. We're having it for dinner."

"A rabbit? Well, nice. . .smells exotic. . .Rabbit meat is hard to get."

"Not this one. I picked it up off the street."

"No!"

"Yes! He was hit by a car. I got him first"

She turned to La. "You mean you intend to eat a dead rabbit off the street?"

La's slender shoulders sagged.

"Your new culture doesn't eat rabbits off the street. You must rise above your old customs."

La turned away.

Earnestly, Zin tried to explain. "But he was almost dead. He was stuck their flip-flopping. I got him soon enough, before the cars could smash him."

The woman shuddered. Her voice rose. "Only scavengers eat that kind of meat. Americans don't. It's degrading. Unsanitary. Rabbits are dirty, lowbred animals. Let me take care of this for you." She took the pot from the stove and dumped its contents into the garbage can.

Zin was stunned into silence. La placed a steadying hand on his shoulder. He looked up at her face, a stoic facade. Gently, she squeezed his shoulder.

The woman smiled benevolently.

"I'll run to the store and get some hot dogs for you." She closed the door and left.

Zin eyed the garbage can. "I hate hot dogs. Rabbit tastes better. Americans eat bad food."

La shut her eyes and said evenly, "We must try harder to learn, Zin. Remember, they've given us a lot. Be grateful."

"I don't care. I hate their rules. Why can't we eat rabbits? We ate them before. Why do we have to listen to them?"

"Zin, they helped us come to America."

"Well, I don't like America. We're like pets here. They give us things and then we have to do tricks for them."

She smiled sadly. Her voice was low and soft. "We are all actors, but we don't always get the parts we like. Come, sit down, Zin. We'll have a sandwich. How about if I read a story to you after we eat?"

"No, I don't want a story. Let's make a circus. We haven't made a circus for a long time."

She brightened. "Okay."

After supper she said, "Zin, bring the clay and your Tinkertoys. What animals do you want to make?"

"The lion and tiger."

"Okay, I'll make the ringmaster and the wire walker."

With the shortest Tinkertoy sticks La constructed armatures for the circus figures. It was only dime store clay, but La skillfully warmed and kneaded it in her hands. When it became pliable, she divided the clay into smaller lumps.

Zin eagerly packed the armatures for the tiger and lion. He stretched and pulled the clay into simple caricatures—a squat, stubby tiger and a top-heavy lion with curlicue mane. When the lion toppled repeatedly, Zin lost interest and turned to the box of Tinkertoys. He built a windmill and then paused to watch his mother, who was still forming circus characters.

On the table before them, a wire walker, with wide-set, scimitar eyes and delicate, oriental cheekbones,

The Sculptors

halted in a pirouette on an invisible tightrope. Directing her was a staunch ringmaster whose broad hips spread a swallowtail coat. Her fleshy cheeks bulged around a whistle. Using tools from a manicure set, La fluted the edge of a parasol and then tiled it in the wire walker's hand.

"Mother, they're good. They look so real. . . . But, Mother, why did you make the ringmaster a lady? The ringmaster we saw was a man. You made this one look like the church lady."

He glanced dubiously at the wire walker. "And, Mother, why is the tightrope walker so sad? I don't like this circus."

La squeezed the ringmaster and the tightrope walker between her hands. Parts of them oozed from between her fingers.

"Someday, I'll make a happy circus. But not today." She shrugged. "Come, Zin. I'll cover you in bed. It's time for sleep."

She opened his bedroom window. Ripened honeysuckle sweetened the breeze. La recalled the fragile fragrances of almond blossoms and downy orange pekoe leaves.

Leaving him, she stepped outside and listened to the night noises. Scurryings, twitterings. Church ladies murmuring vesper canticles. Alien philosophy. Alien land.

Overhead, the night pitched a black tent with holes for stars— a celestial thicket of loneliness. She walked to the edge of the neighborhood. Across the street, the bowery flickered like dragon lanterns. A door opened. Glasses tinkled like wind charms. Shyly, La stepped inside.

"Buy you a beer?"

"Yes, okay."

"Have a seat."

"Thank you."

He studied her face. There was something reticent in her smile. "You look blue."

"Blue?"

"Sad."

"Oh, sad."

"Are you sad?"

"Sometimes—everyone is sad sometimes."

"Where are you from?"

"Cambodia."

"How long have you been here?"

"A year."

"Is that all? You have almost no accent."

"Thank you. I learned it before I came here."

"How?"

"My husband valued education. He hired a missionary to tutor me. The missionary's church sponsored my son and myself."

The foam of the beer tickled her nose. She had not tasted beer since she left Cambodia.

"A little more?"

"Yes, thanks."

"Your husband didn't come with you?"

"My husband has been missing for four years."

"Do you still hope to find him?"

"No. . . . maybe he wouldn't even want me anymore."

"Why?"

He studied her eyes, eyes suddenly dimmed by a profound melancholy.

"Everything has changed now. Before the war I was an honor to him." Her delicate hands lifted the crude mug. She slipped slowly.

"You are not an honor to him now?"

"No."

"Why?"

"I had a gift. . . ." She hesitated.

"For what?"

La glanced down and looked at her nails still rimmed with crescents of clay. "It doesn't matter now."

He remained quiet. He waited for her to continue.

She sipped some more beer and then said, "My husband left to fight. Most men never returned. People scattered."

"Where did you go?"

"I waited for him, but food was hard to get. Friends fought over garbage in the alleys."

"How did you survive?"

"My son and I were very poor. Then American soldiers came. They like to spend money. I could speak English. They would take me out. . . ." She glanced away.

"I see." He smiled at her. "What about the missionary?"

"She left before the bombs. The church sent her to a safer place." Her sensitive fingers traced the coarse scallops in the glass mug.

"Now that you're here, aren't you happy in America?"

She paused, then smiled wistfully. "America is very generous. I keep saying thank you. But it's hard to change

I make many mistakes."

"Is that why you look so sad?"

"I suppose. My culture is gone. I have nothing to offer. There is no one to talk to."

- He reached across the table and stroked her hand. "You can talk to me."

She looked down, embarrassed. Beer caused careless chatter.

"More beer?"

"No, I can't stay. I'd better get home to my son."

"Can I take you home?"

"It's not far. I can walk."

"Can I walk with you?"

"No. . . . well, okay."

They walked beneath the porcelain glow of street lights. Shadows of sycamore leaves dappled the sidewalk and branches rocked like sampans in the wind.

"Like a piece of cinnamon candy?"

"Yes, I've always liked cinnamon."

"Oh, do they have cinnamon in Cambodia?"

Cinnamon, extract from the bark of cassia trees. Trees that lined the path to her village. Trees defoliated—and stripped slick.

She shut her eyes. "Yes, they had cinnamon in Cambodia." The candy cracked between her teeth.

They sat on her front steps. His arm slid around her shoulder and pulled her closer to him. For a moment La wished she could hide in his lap. Beer caused crazy thoughts. But when he kissed her, La suddenly stiffened. She jumped up, shaken.

"What's the matter?"

"I can't. It's too late. There's nothing left."

The door closed.

La lay in bed, rigid. Her heart knocked against her ribs, a shrouded heart, leeched bloodless, like the empty chambers of a sand-dollar skeleton.

On the night stand rested the rosewood box. Inside were hidden the old bandsaw blades and the wire clay cutters. La cradled the box. Dry, hollow sobs rattled her chest.

She mourned what lay in the rubble of home. Only the tools remained. Tools locked in the box. Tools tucked in the chinks of her mind.

Hugging the box, she drowsed into a bleak limbo preceding dawn. Where anxieties ravage unguarded dreams. Where nightmares tinker with sanity.

The kiln roars. Its melon glow outlines eerie silhouettes of men in La's

again. War. Peace. Different customs.

village. They are pinioned to cross beams—giant armatures erected in the forms of crucifixes. In a seething cauldron, La stirs powdered clay, wax, oil and grease. When it cools to a suspension of moist clay, she scoops some up with her hands. Slowly, methodically, she packs every armature. With tools fashioned from pieces of old bandsaw blades, she finishes the clay, working across the contours of their bodies. Finally, she seals each body, except the most familiar one.

He wrestles the pinions. "The tanks are rumbling again. Let me down. I

must fight."

She smiles. "No. I shall make you monoliths. Dolmens. A cromlech circle. Witnesses to Cambodian culture."

He struggles, feeble in the vice-like restraints, and cries, "But you no longer qualify. . . . Your hands are tainted."

Her voice is flat. "I grew hungry."
Broken, he weeps, "No, not that hungry. You are the jaded sculptor.
You work men, not clay."

The tanks rumble closer. La escapes. And steel-belted grids crush souls of martyrs.

"Wake up, Mother. Stop screaming." Zin was shaking her. "What is it? Is it the bombs, Mother? Were you dreaming of the bombs?"

"It's okay, Zin. Just bad dreams. Go back to sleep. It's okay." Groggy, La sat up and stared at her hands.

Later that morning, a pert woman rapped at the door. "I've come to photograph and interview you for *The Beacon*. We are going to publish your pictures and story on the front page of the church newspaper. America is full of surprises. Bet no one ever wrote an article about you before."

"Yes, someone did long ago."

"About what?"

"It's not important anymore."

"Can you stand up next to the wall? That's it. I need a plain background. Are you wearing Tessie's old dress? Bet so. Looks a lot better on you, but don't tell her I said so. Smile. That's it. Now to the side. Good. A few more. Nice. Very nice. Where's Zin?"

"At school."

"Oh, well. I'll get him later. Now for the interview. Oh, before we get started, you wouldn't happen to have any of your old clothes that you could put on, would you, so I could get kind of a 'before and after' picture?" "No."

"Well, I guess it doesn't matter. Let's get on with the interview. How do you like America?"

"I love it."

"That's good."

"Has it been difficult to adjust to?"

"In some ways."

"You mean—with all the luxuries? It's hard to comprehend how great America really is?"

"Yes, that's it."

"Now wait. Don't speak too rapidly. I pride myself on accuracy. Let me write this down. You say, 'after escaping from your background, it's hard to adjust to the luxuries in America?"

"Yes."

"Good. Very good. Now, how do you feel about our church?"

"I'm grateful to the church for all the help they've given us."

"You mean physical and spiritual?"

"Yes."

"Okay, let's see, 'you're grateful to the church for all the physical and spiritual blessings you've received since your arrival?"

"Yes."

"Oh, that's marvelous. What a marvelous testimony. Let me get this all down." She scribbled furiously.

"Then you obviously believe sponsoring refugees is a powerful mission outreach?"

"Yes."

Manuscript (for Tony)

Minutes are quick passages, layering themselves into days that stick together finally like pages in an old novel.

Part of the plot, lost along the way, must be rewritten, motives revised (if remembered), characters redone, because they were too Romantic, and unmarked chapters reordered, because one day the binding gave way.

No one remembers where they go, these fragments of thought, these memories as empty as teachers' desks in midsummer when silence repeats all the "once upon a time"s of a life.

At last these costly dreams, paid for by meager time, lie scattered on the floor, and a clock hangs on the wall, like a big price tag.

John Bolinger Munster, Indiana "Is there anything you'd like to add?"

"No."

"Well, what more could you say? You've said it all. You've given such an inspiring personal testimony, La. I just want to personally congratulate you and tell you how delighted I am as part of the body of our Lord to have a small hand in molding your new life."

La smiled and thought of the rabbit.

That night La slept fitfully again, in naps and nightmares. She awoke, weary, and soon a couple arrived to take them to the Sunday morning church service.

"Good morning, La and Zin. How nice you look in your Sunday clothes. We are so proud of you."

"Thank you."

The car doors slammed. The driver pressed the automatic lock button.

The woman smiled brightly. "Even though I've lived in America all my life, I am thankful each Sunday morning for freedom to worship." She poked her husband. "Aren't you glad La and Zin can come worship with us?"

"Yes, of course."

La sat leaden-eyed through the Sunday church service. Zin fidgeted.

The preacher rambled. "There once was a lady touring the mountains of Switzerland who encountered a shepherd bandaging the leg of a lamb.

'Did he fall?' she asked.

'No. I broke his leg and now I'm fixing it.'

'Why?'

'He wouldn't follow me. He was stubborn. No matter where the rest of the flock went, he went the opposite. So I broke his leg. When it heals, you can be sure he will follow me.' And that is what the Lord, our Shepherd, must do to us sometimes.''

After church, the refugee committee sipped coffee.

"We're going to have to insist she wear a bra."

"It's fairly obvious."

"People are commenting."

"What if she doesn't wear underpants, either?"

"We bought some."

"Yes, but how do you know she actually wears them?"

"That's tricky. . .We could ask her how they fit."

"We could wait for a windy day."

"Don't be crude."

"We even have a worse problem."

"No, what?"

"Last night Winston Davids saw her walking down the street late at night with a man."

"Who was he?"

"Winston said it wasn't anybody he knew. He was afraid it might have been one of those characters from that bar."

"No. . . . "

"Well, he doesn't know for sure, but they were walking from that direction. And the man looked like the dark and sneaky type that hangs out in bars. Winston says he got a good look at them when they walked under the street light."

"We have got to talk to her."

"Now for sure she has to wear a bra."

"We'll have to be very tactful."

"Very."

That night La tossed in trembling sweaty fits. She awoke, tormented by her dreams, and sat up rigidly in bed. Moonlight sifted through the gossamer curtains, silhouetting a penumbral shadow of the rosewood box. La unlocked the hox. removed the bandsaw blades and wire clay cutters, and cradled them in her lap. Silent, quicksilver tears beaded the blades. La wiped them clean with the flannel sleeve of her night shirt. Near starfall she drifted back into troubled sleep.

An iron kettle bubbles. Kaolin, feldspar and quartz melt.

La works deftly. With skillful strokes, the old bandsaw blades form the contours of skeletal ribbing and mold the fragile fabric of wings. Finally, the porcelain paste gives birth to a butterfly leaping into a ballet of freedom.

As the butterfly nears completion, La feels a heady exhilaration. It is as though La is a skater, whirling and dancing across the ice, only the blades on the skates are old bandsaw blades and the ice is porcelain. Yet the dance is nearly flawless. One crucial turn and it will be complete.

But then there appear faces La knows. They are ghoulish white, like cold-cream masks at midnight. Dutifully, La pauses and offers tea. Bloodless lips part and sip leisurely. Glittering rhinestone eyes appraise the butterfly. La feels suddenly naked.

Midnight

The hours hang limp as sweaty summer hair. Black melancholy hours breeding ashes, stale-grey of half-smoked cigarettes and brooding ice-diluted scotch-bottomed glasses. Lost-in-thought eyes shift restlessly from chair to empty chair, while the mute phone's dissonance screams agonizingly too close. Hollow party laughter sneers through thinly plastered walls, while the open-mouthed window breathes in street life below: tires squeal, excitedly boasting of war with stifling night traffic lights; city sidewalks flanked with couples lured by the dictates of disco beats erotically pulsating, spit passion into cave-crowded lounges. Hotels flash neon smiles, and the artist smiles. grimly.

Christine Ney Nilson Riverdale, Illinois

"A little sugar, please." The porcelain hardens.

"A little lemon, please."

La's hands hurry, but the presences are inhibiting and the bandsaw blades drag.



Alan P. Magiera

"La, we have a rather awkward matter to discuss. Since you've come to America, the only people you've gotten to know are those in our own church circles. Unfortunately, you won't always be protected by people like us. Some types you have to watch out for."

The ribbing sags.

"You live in a low-rent district and usually these areas breed problems so you have to be doubly careful who you talk to, especially late at night."

The ribbing sags more. Alarm quickens La's hands.

"More sugar, please."

The rhinestone eyes flicker and snap like the haywire unreeling of old movie film. Docile, obedient, La pours more tea.

"Do you know what 'exploit' means, La?"

"I think so."

"Well, there are people who could exploit you, especially men, the type that come out of bars and walk the streets late at night. A lot of these men think Oriental women are. . . . well, you know what I mean, La?"

"Yes."

"Of course, we all know you're not

that way, but a lot of that type of men might think so. We just want to warn you in case you ever meet one. . . . Of course, you'd never walk the street late at night, would you?"

"No."

The ribbing stretches taut. It begins tearing. La struggles frantically to restore it. Probing, laser eyes sear La's hands. Her fingers stiffen.

"A fresh napkin, please. You look so peaked. Are you taking those vitamins? Anyway, another thing—men who aren't in our circles love to see women without bras. They know right away when they see a woman without a bra that she's probably the type who drinks beer and carries sinful diseases."

La struggles to salvage the butterfly. Her hands are shrivelled soulless—purified, cauterized, sterile. The armature buckles. Shreds of butterfly dangle, aborted. And the ballet ends.

"We are so proud of how you are progressing, La."

"Yes, La, every day we see improvement. We are so pleased. Thanks for the nice time."

The ghoulish cold-cream faces fade. Glittering rhinestone eyes explode and

shards of glass pepper the butterfly.

The haywire unreeling was at an end.

She bundled their belongings into a rayon-fringed tablecloth.

"Where are we going, Mother?"

"Away, Zin. We're going to try once more."

"But where?" Alarm threaded his voice.

Firmly, gently, her hand gripped his shoulder and steadied him. "I don't know where. Maybe to find a happy circus. We must keep trying."

The ladies had their last refugee coffee meeting.

"We did our best."

"We tried so hard."

"Why would she leave?"

"I don't know. . . . I just don't

"Did she take anything when they left?"

"I don't think so, only that little wooden box she always kept by her bed"

"Well, she won't get very far with that."

Jan Swart Highland, Indiana

Insomnia

In the black of night, when howling trains converse with crying crickets and hissing, ticking clocks, flickering shadows mingle with deep pillowed thoughts refusing to ease the troubled dark into sunlit day.

Christine Ney Nilson Riverdale, Illinois

Spring Rain

A robin wet, with feathers matted,
Battered by the winds and tattered,
Stands on one leg in the lane
Drenched by silver mist of rain;
While daffodils beside the shed
Quench their thirst, each golden head,
As a springtime breeze upheaves
Mounds of last year's brown oak leaves.
And beneath the greening land,
Flora starts to rouse as planned
As spring rain plays its trump in hand.

Virginia Grimmer Schererville, Indiana

thinking of you

I was wasting time, my mind stumbling over ideas in search of a poem or a fragment, something to grab, to build a house of words with, to live in for a while.

Then I thought of you.

J. B. Mulligan Fort Lee, New Jersey The grey spring sky cried upon the winter-brown shoulder of the earth, and both felt better.

Christine Ney Nilson Riverdale, Illinois

A Child's Testimony

I couldn't sleep at all that night
A feeling something wasn't right.
I waited, then I finally rose
Replaced my nightgown with my clothes.

I ventured slowly down the hall
I didn't want to wake them all
And carefully creeping down the stairs
A surge that said I shouldn't dare.

The storm was very loud outside
But that had never made me cry.
Yet tears were streaming down my face
Was this a dream, where was this place?

Just then I heard an awful sound And that is when I turned around. I saw their light was on inside They'd comfort me, and let me cry.

And finally there I peered inside I heard her plead, and beg, and cry. And standing there I felt so scared But didn't move, I only stared.

Their struggling shadows on the wall I didn't even see it all But what I saw shall always stay A night like this won't go away.

It seemed to be a long, long time But quiet now, I walked inside The blood still gushing from her head My only mama's really dead.

And sir: I think that's all I'll say Except it isn't fair this way For now she's dead and so is he I hate them both for leaving me.

Nancy Robinson Hammond, Indiana





Winning Selections

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Since the editors feel children's writing should remain inviolate, editorial changes have been kept to a minimum.

John Bolinger



Mechanic

Tammy couldn't even hope to compete with pretty Laura Linder—or could she?

Tammy stood in a puddle, rain pelting her face, waiting for the bus to take her to The Lake. Her spirits were as soggy as her soaked sneakers.

Three weeks of vacation were gone and she had scarcely seen Matt. As she had left the cabin to go to The Village for groceries that morning, her father had asked, "Where's Matt? He's hardly been around. Other years he practically lived here."

Tammy didn't want her father to know how abandoned she felt so she said lightly, "Oh, you know how it is. Laura Linder blew in with her blond curls. Matt has appointed himself her private tour guide."

Her father looked up from his

"Oh? Who fixes his car?"

"Guess it hasn't broken down lately." She pulled her poncho over her head and escaped out the door.

Now, with waterfalls cascading over her forehead, a bag of groceries clutched under her poncho, she watched the new attendant at the gas station across the street. He sloshed around administering gas and repairing windshield wipers. The grapevine had it that his name was Joe. He was older—probably seventeen.

A well aged convertible pulled up, blocking her view of Joe. She was well acquainted with the innards of this vintage car as she had spent hours with Matt the past year repairing it.

Matt called, "What're you doing standing out here?"

"Waiting for a space shuttle, obviously."

"They're all grounded. Hop in."

On the seat beside Matt huddled drenched, blond Laura. She edged over to a wet pocket as Tammy scrambled in beside her.

Since they were small children, Matt and Tammy's families had vacationed together. This year, for the first time, Matt left her out. She slammed the door, Hard.

"Wasn't raining when I came into The Village this morning," she said. "Thought I could make it back before I was drowned."

Laura, her curls hanging in limp lumps, didn't look quite so cuddlesome.

"This is the worst place I've ever been," she announced to the world.

Tammy suddenly decided maybe the rain wasn't so bad after all.

They had driven, in silence, for about a mile out of The Village when the motor quit. Just like that. It stopped as though the ignition had been turned off.

Matt ground the starter. The gas gauge showed half full. Matt ground again—and again—and again. Nothing.

Tammy began to squirm. He'd run down the battery. The dope! But she said nothing. He wanted to impress Laura. Let him.

Swearing under his breath, he got out and lifted the hood. He jiggled some wires, tapped some connections, climbed back in and turned the key. Nothing.

He slithered out of the seat again, poked at some other connections.

Tammy looked off into the trees. Her father had taught her to be a very good mechanic. Laura's father hadn't taught her anything, Tammy guessed. But Laura was getting all of Matt's attention. So Tammy viewed the scenery and looked helpless, too. In fact, she rather enjoyed watching the rain dance like popcorn as it hit the pavement.

Matt pulled his head from under the hood, threw up his hands and yelled, "I don't know what to do with the darned thing." He turned to Tammy. "Would you take a look?"

Peering through her plastered down bangs, Tammy said innocently, "Who? Me?" Matt ignored her wiles. "Oh, come off it, Tam. You've fixed this car dozens of times." Then his tone softened. He was in a bind. He certainly wasn't making any time with Laura. "Please take a look?"

Should she play the fragile female like Laura? Tammy hesitated. She should let him fall flat on his face. But they would drown walking back to The Village. Big deal, getting a ride. Why hadn't she waited for the bus?

"O.K. I'll look." She eased the groceries onto the seat, then pounded the door open. "But how would I know what do do if you can't get it started?" Might as well play the innocent a few minutes longer. She had a pretty good idea what was wrong.

Taking the red bandanna off her head, she wiped the carburetor and the spark plugs. Then she checked the wiring to all the connections. "See if there's any spark coming through," she told Matt. He slid in and turned the ignition key. Just as she thought. No spark.

They heard another car coming, but Tammy ignored it. A white Corvette pulled up in front of them. A lanky young man got out and ran over with his head down against the rain.

"Having trouble?" he asked.

Matt said, "Yeh, the motor just stopped dead."

The young man nodded. "I'm Joe Garson. I'm working at the garage in The Village. Want me to take a look?"

By this time Tammy had the distributor cap off. "Just what I thought," she said to no one in particular.

Reaching up, she unclipped the barrette from her hair. "Got your pliers with you?" she asked Matt.

"No, I left my tool kit at home."

"Want me to take a look?" Joe offered again. "What are you doing?"

Available

by Lenore Pierzchala Highland High School

"The distributor point spring is broken," Tammy explained. "I'm going to make a temporary spring from the prong of this barrette. Only I need the pliers to cut the wire and coil it."

Joe sounded doubtful. But trying to be polite, he said, "What you need is a set of points." Turning to Matt, he offered, "I could go back to The Village and get them for you."

As though she were explaining subtraction to a six-year-old, Tammy said patiently, "In the meantime, if you have a pair of pliers, I can make a tem-

porary spring and we can get out of this sopping rain."

Joe's tone changed to one of respect. "Sure, I'll get mine." He dashed to his car and back. As she handed her the pliers, he said, "You're really a girl?"

"Sure, ever since I was born."

Tammy worked quickly and fitted the new spring in place. She wiped the moisture off the distributor cap and replaced it. To Matt she said, "Now turn it over."

Matt seated himself in the puddle behind the steering wheel. The motor sputtered, then settled to a steady hum. He heaved a deep sigh.

The expression on Joe's face was not that of a teacher. "Well, that's a new one for me. I'd never have believed it. Say, would you like a ride back to The Lake with me? That seat looks a little wet."

Without a moment's hesitation Tammy said, "Sure," and slammed down the hood of Matt's car. "Let me get my groceries."

Rain or no rain, this was going to be a good summer after all.

My Teddy Bear

With drooping ears and a missing eye, my teddy bear on my bed would lie.

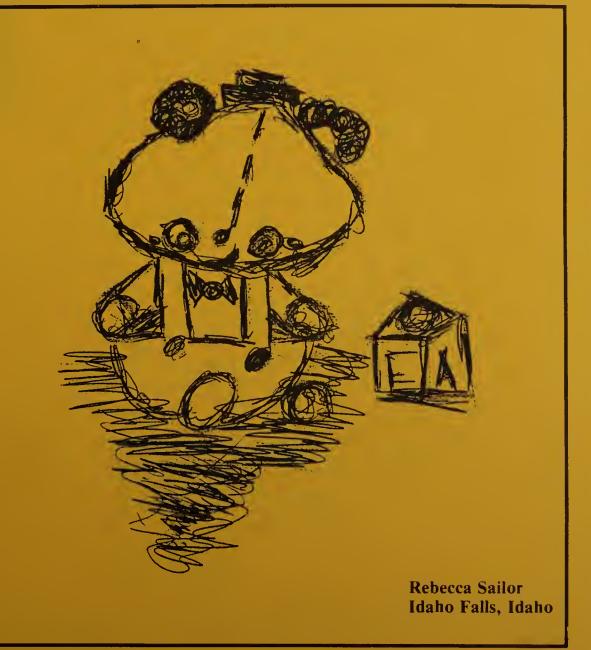
Not a night would pass without teddy by my side, comforting my fears, under the covers we'd hide.

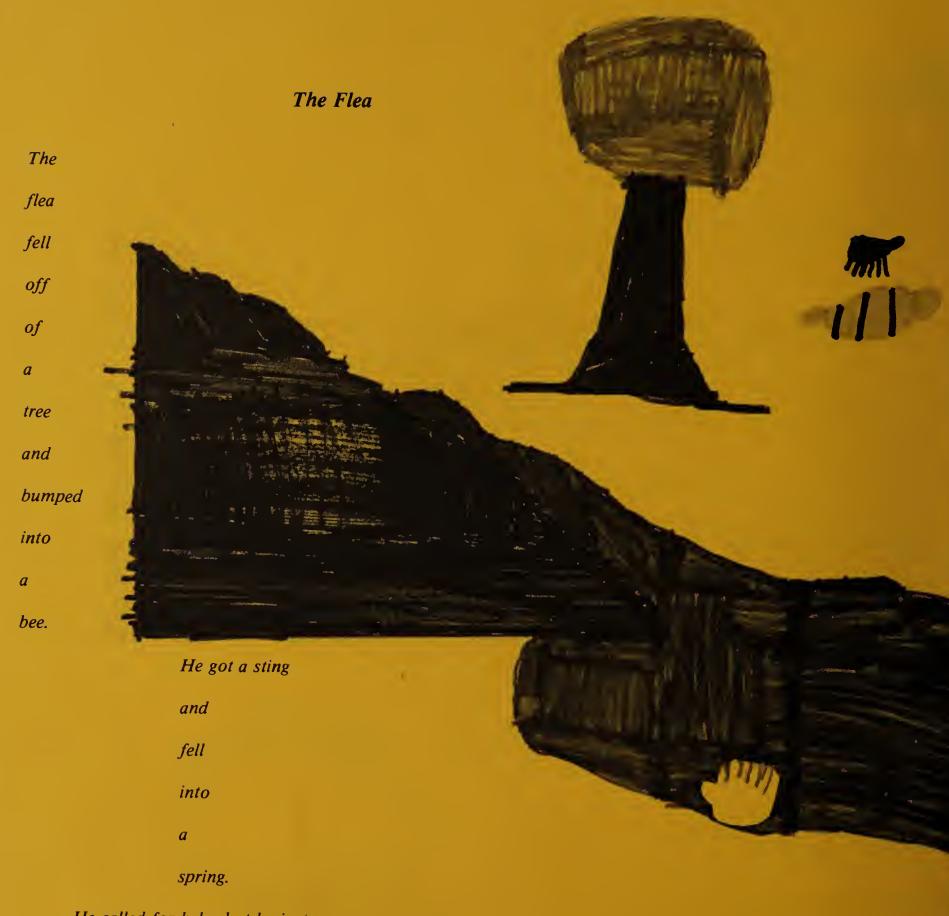
One day I grew up and left teddy behind, unknowingly I had lost what you seldom return to find.

Once in the attic I chanced to find old teddy in a box, his droopy ears and one eyed charm among some well-used building blocks.

I dusted him off and sewed on an eye, now once again my teddy on my bed does lie.

Lee Ann Schneegas Valparaiso, Indiana Thomas Jefferson Jr. High





He called for help, but he just

took

a

big

gulp,

And now he is dead in his watery bed.

Drawing and Poem
David Ensley
Munster, Indiana
Frank Hammond School





Birds

Birds, beautiful birds Fly very high in the sky Don't fall little birds.

Drawing and Poem
Carol Mergl
Kouts, Indiana
Kouts Elementary School



One cloudy day in April, a little orphan girl went out to pick flowers in the woods near the orphanage. When she had about twenty flowers in the bunch, she realized that she was lost! She was very frightened because the clouds were rolling in like a big tidal wave in the sky. The little girl strained to see through the thick, clustered trees. It started to rain and she tried calling for help, but it didn't work.

She ran under a tree and took out the piece of cloth that her lunch was in and

threw it over her head to keep dry. By now, she was wet, cold, and shivering. She decided to stay under the tree until the storm stopped and soon fell asleep.

Suddenly, there was a loud CRASH! The little orphan girl awoke, but she wasn't a little orphan any more because she was in a place where everything was pretty and white and... she was with her MOTHER and FATHER!!!!

Jennifer Russell
Lowell, Indiana
Oak Hill Elementary School

Teacher

Anne Sullivan wanted to reach her, Helen Keller called her, "Teacher."

Patricia Ernest Cedar Lake, Indiana Jane Horton Ball Elementary School

Confession

I knocked over my mom's fern.
And oh boy, was she stern.
I blamed it all on the dog.
But later confessed, I made the mess.

Kellie McElmurry Cedar Lake, Indiana Jane Horton Ball Elementary School

What do you call two broken windows?

"Double Trouble."

John Willems Cedar Lake, Indiana Jane Horton Ball Elementary School

Horses

Horses are so stately prancing, On the road hear them dancing. Racing on to please their master. So we see them going faster. Leaving marks on the road, When they have a heavy load.

Tricia Funk Cedar Lake, Indiana Jane Horton Ball Elementary School



Riding on Our Bicycles

Around and around, On our bicycles, We love to ride our bicycles.

Around and around
On our bicycles,
Having fun and laughter.

Around and around,
On our bicycles,
On the next block and back.

Toni Vincent Gary, Indiana Banneker Elementary School

What would you call a wet puppy? "Soggy Doggy."

Ricky Perrin Cedar Lake, Indiana Jane Horton Ball Elementary School

My Dog

His nose is short and scrubby, His ears hang rather low, And he always brings the stick back No matter how far you throw.

He gets spanked rather often
For things he shouldn't do,
Like lying on beds and barking,
And eating up shoes when they're new.

He always wants to be going Where he isn't supposed to go, He tracks up the house when it's snowing, Oh puppy I love you so!

Charnell Kimble Gary, Indiana Holy Angels School

The Pink Hippopotamus

In the town of Pumperwinkle there lived a pink hippopotamus. He had toe nails that were as red as blood. If you saw him, you would have to say he was a strange looking animal. But he was as lonely as he was funny looking.

Almost everyday he went walking in the park, looking for someone to play with. But everyone just stared at him and laughed. This made him very sad. He always went to his cave and cried, cried, and cried. All this made his eyes very red, too.

He even went to the zoo to look for someone to play with. All he wanted was to have just one friend. But as you know, all the other hippopotamuses were gray. So they just laughed at the lonely pink hippo. No one really thought they were being cruel, but the pink hippo was very sad. Was that so much to want? Just one little playmate?

One day the sun was shining very brightly. The little hippo went for a walk in the park again. The mayor of the town stopped him and said, "You're the first hippopotamus with red toe nails that I have ever seen. Do you know why you have such an odd color?"

"If I knew," answered the hippo, "I guess I wouldn't be so sad. You're the first person that has ever talked to me," he said.

The mayor thought for a while. Then he said, "I know what! I shall celebrate Pink Hippopotamus Day. Everyone will have to come."

Soon the mayor was very busy planning for the big day. He had everyone working. There were cakes to be baked, lemonade to be made, and even cotton candy. There were to be rides and everything. All the children in Pumperwinkle were busy, too.

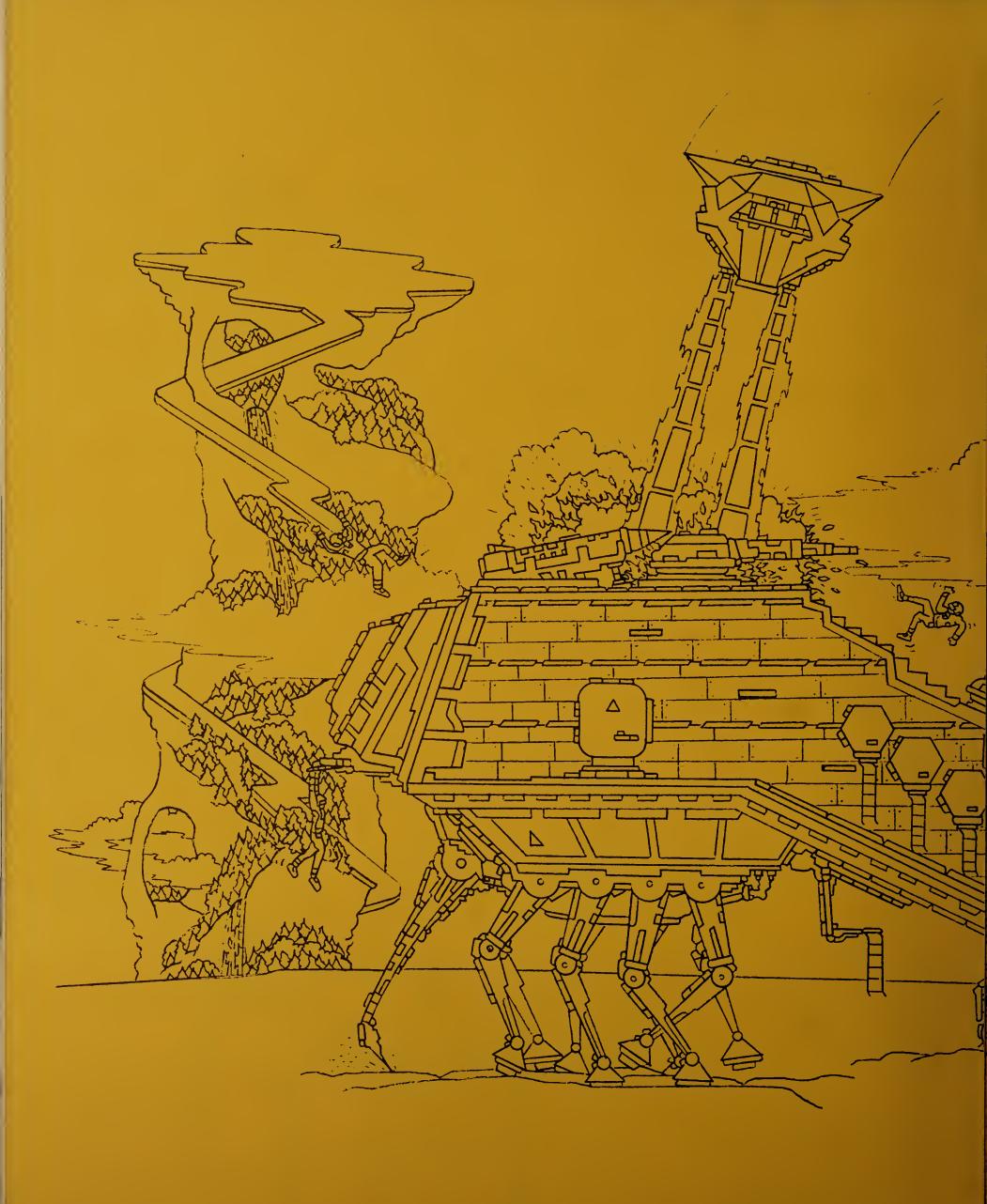
When the big day arrived, everyone was very excited. And just as the mayor had said, everyone in the town came to the celebration. The hippopotamus was so happy, and everyone in the town had a good time. In fact, the day was such a great success that the mayor decided to celebrate "Pink Hippopotamus Day" every year.

At every Pink Hippopotamus Day picnic, they have pink lemonade, hippopotamus cake with pink icing, pink little frosted hippopotamus candies, and red hot candies for his toe nails. To the people of Pumperwinkle, Pink H. Day is just like a national holiday.

Now the pink hippopotamus has many friends. They even have a name for him; they call him "Rosey." But what else would you call a pink hippo with red toe nails? Everyone in town thought that that was a very fitting name.

When Rosey walks through the parks and streets, everybody stops to talk to him. All of the other hippos are jealous because Rosey walks in the zoo, and everyone runs to talk to him, even the people who work at the zoo. Now Rosey is very, very happy.

Diana Lecea Dyer, Indiana Michael Grimmer Middle School



Dream of Thomas Jefferson

Cyndi Hill

Merrillville, Indiana Merrillville High School

In a fantasy I dreamed of moving buggies made of steel, I saw metal monsters in the fields.

And the boats moved so quickly up stream,
But suddenly—it was a shattered dream.

Next night I dreamed of paved highway roads And things that could lift impossible loads. I saw a metal bird fly people in the sky, But I fell asleep, and the vision began to die.

The next night I saw buildings eighty stories high, But the people just kept on walking by.

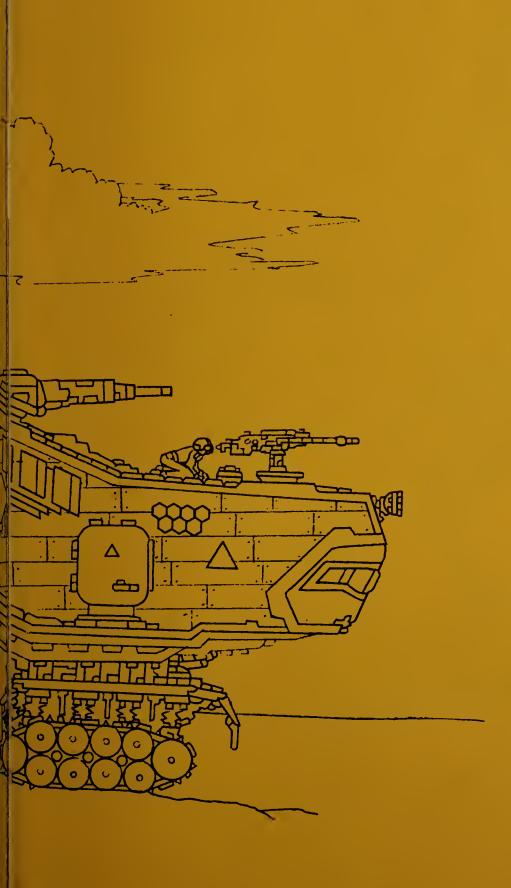
I looked up into the cloudy sky,
There was greyish-black fog and I wondered why.
It was a price they paid with no easy solution,
The air and rivers were filled with pollution.

The people, it seemed, grew more restless each day. Afraid of each other, they scurried on their way.

Then I saw a weapon of destruction,
To level a Japanese city was its function.
A madman who sought to control all those on Earth
Destroyed many thousands from a certain birth.

In another country our people fight to help others, Mothers, sisters, girlfriends, weeping for brothers. The youngsters are an angry generation, Moving all around this frightened nation.

But my eyes grew tired with sleep And my dream had caused me to weep. This great country I've helped to create Will never change like in my dream — Forever will it be great!



Robert L. Dusek Chicago, Illinois George Washington High School



So handsome, those stately animals
Running through the cool wind.
Their coat so shiny and bright
Their manes gently waving
Hooves clip-clopping on the ground.
What a beautiful sight to see and hear.

Tracy Phillips Cedar Lake, Indiana Jane Horton Ball Elementary School

My Nightmare

It was a dismal night in October of 1969 when my family and I ended our quest for freedom. We had just arrived from Havana, Cuba on Florida Air, and as the passengers prepared for landing I could not help but wonder at the many years of suffering which had finally driven us here.

My parents were middle class Cubans who worked hard for what they had. For example, my father owned and operated a taxicab. During Batista's time this was very lucrative employment. Another example is my mother who worked as a dietician in a hospital. Together, my parents were able to feed their first child and have enough spending money to invest in land. Then in 1959 Castro took over and everything they owned was taken away. It was that same year that my parents decided to leave, and it was four years later that I was born. My birth was expected but not joyously. My parents did not want their children to grow up under the Castro regime which was associated with suffering. Somehow we managed and as the years passed by, like many other Cubans, our visas had not yet been granted.

Soon came the day when I had to enroll in school. It was here where fear was indoctrinated. I was told that America would not want us and that blacks were usually mistreated. I am a black Hispanic and this frightened me. Slowly I blamed my parents for wanting to leave.

It was not until the end of my second year in school that my feelings began to change. I began to notice how lonely I really was. My classmates excluded me from everything they did. They knew that my parents had asked for visas to leave the country, and out of envy, they lashed out their emotions at me by having nothing to do with me. Under the new government everyone suffered, but not everyone could leave. Many in order to survive had accepted the Communist Party. These were people who lived well in Cuba and had to stay there. This explains why my teachers were also often indifferent. And even though I loved school it got to the point that there was nothing left for me in Cuba. I was, as they said, "the enemy."

Many other children like myself were isolated from society. And their fathers were sent to sugar cane plantations to work and were given only one meal a day often consisting of bread and water. We rarely saw him, but when we did he would reassure us that someday we would all be together-my two brothers, my parents, and myself. He had enough faith for all of us. It was not until a sunny afternoon, ten years after the original vow to leave was said that our visas were finally granted. We were told that we would be allowed to take only the clothes on our backs and nothing else. The hardest part of our soon-to-be-over journey was saying goodbye to our grandparents who had not turned against us like the rest of our family. It was a month later when we actually were allowed to leave the country.

Shortly after our arrival in Miami, Florida, we were told that the Episcopal Church in Gary, Indiana had sponsored us and that our new home would be there. We had never heard of this city but we were willing to go. Our first impression of Gary was not a good one. Nevertheless, five days later when the same church found my father a job at U.S. Steel, we decided

to stay. In school I slowly adjusted. I had to learn English and I found this very difficult, but deep down I was determined to keep up with my American classmates.

On December 23, 1979, my father, my younger sister, and I returned to Cuba. I was shocked at the living conditions of our family and that of the general populace. Those who had once labeled us as "the enemy" begged us for American goods. We were only allowed to stay a week, but that was enough to make me realize how lucky we are who live in America, the Land of "Freedom, Justice and Equality."

Lucy Rodriguez Gary, Indiana Andrean High School

Working in Them Fields

Working in them fields, singing my song, Pullin that cottin, all day long. Massah there starren with that whip, Me looking at my good Lord, for that sweet trip!

Kasey Thompson
Gary, Indiana
Marquette Elementary School

If I Had the Ability

If God gave me the ability to write,
I think I'd stay up day and night.
I would write the most beautiful verses,
About policemen, firemen, doctors, and nurses.

My parents would rate a poem or two, Maybe my brothers and sisters too. Or I could write about a falling star, And the sun that keeps us warm from afar.

Even about puppies and kittens, as cute as can be, Or maybe about fish that swim in the sea.

And lions and tigers who are so ferocious,

Also ugly, old monsters that are scary and atrocious.

I'd write about heaven and earth, Joy and sorrow, happiness and mirth. There would be no stopping me, Dear God, all I need is the ability.

Diana Lecea Dyer, Indiana Michael Grimmer Middle School

Daydreaming

It was a clear fall day and my dad and I had just finished raking leaves. I sat down to watch him burn the leaves and a leaf fell on my lap. As I started to rip the leaf, I thought to myself, "It serves them right. What right had they to fall on the yard and create something else to keep me from having fun?" As I sat there watching the burning leaves, I felt my eyelids getting heavy. I drifted off to sleep...

Suddenly, I felt myself swaying, as in a breeze. Puzzled, I looked around and saw that I was in a tree. Around me the wind blew, and it started to snow. I knew it must be cold, but I was nice and cozy inside my bud. As the winter days passed, I was growing inside my bud. I watched the children playing outside, building snowmen and having snowball fights. They had great fun. As I grew, my bud got tighter and



tighter. I hoped winter would end soon.

Finally, spring came and it got warmer. I wanted to get out into that warmth and sunshine so I started wriggling around. As I felt the bud splitting, I struggled harder until I was out. Around me I saw other leaves had emerged from their buds too. Some were still struggling to break loose. Through conversation I found out that the leaf next to me was called Elijah. As we grew to full size leaves, we became close friends. The following weeks were ones of alternate rain and sunshine.

The spring passed into summer and with it came summer vacation for the children. From one of the stronger branches of my tree, they hung a swing. I watched in dismay as the leaves around it were torn to shreds by

the ropes. However, the children paid no attention to the tearing leaves. I began to wonder if anything so terrible would happen to me.

As summer came to a close and the days got cooler, I felt a change coming over me. As fall progressed, I turned from orange to red and yellow. During those days, I felt wonderful. I never wanted to change. I was beautiful. Then I changed again. I changed to the ugliest brown you have ever seen. I thought the world had come to an end. I wondered what would happen next. I watched as the other leaves fell gently to the ground. Finally, Elijah and I fell also. "What will happen to us now?" I asked, a little afraid.

"I'm not sure," said Elijah. "But, I have a feeling it is going to be horrible." I could tell he was afraid too.

Before we knew what was happening, something with long fingers on it swept us all together in a pile. A few of the others got stabbed by the fingers and would never know the pain that awaited us. A man rubbed a stick against a box and a yellow flame jumped to life. A terrible dread came over me as he put it down by some of the other leaves, and the flame began to spread. I started hoping, praying, that a gust of wind would blow me away. I could hear the other leaves burning. The flame got closer and closer, and I began to feel the heat. . . .

I woke up just as Dad was telling me to move away from the fire. As I watched the leaves burn, I felt a kind of sorrow for them. I wondered if they really could feel the heat or the pain when the fire reached them. I thanked God for the leaves and everything else on this earth. Never again did I complain about the leaves.

Joy Pruis DeMotte, Indiana Kankakee Valley High School

My Metamorphosis

The rain had turned the day gray and gloomy. I was feeling a little weird. I thought it might be because of all the hassles that were going on around me and because of the fact that I needed a little sleep. But I soon learned that it was a change going on in my body. It came about very slowly but finally it happened. One day I woke up and I felt really strange, like something was different, really different. I found out why I felt this way when I looked in the mirror. I was horrified. I had turned into—of all things—a fly!

At first I was really shocked. But after getting used to the idea that I wasn't my old self, I began to try to accept my new way of life. I started to think that it couldn't be any worse than the life I was living. So I decided to fly around and see the world and get some food.

Well, I finally found some food, and after I'd eaten about all I could, I decided to fly around and see what else the world had to offer.

I flew around from place to place to see what other people's lives were like. There was one family where the father had died recently, and he had been the only one who was supporting the family. Now they were all going to have to go out and find a job and none were very skilled at anything. How they're going to make it, I don't know.

I flew around to a few more houses, and other families had some real problems too, like divorces and deaths.

Then there was one family; this girl had a lot of brothers and sisters, and she was neglected as she wasn't genuinely loved as much as the others. She got almost everything she wanted, except for the love and affection of her family. The family was always fighting and arguing, because this girl would go out and do things, some of which were against the law, just to gain attention. That continually made her parents even more irate. Things weren't going

too well.

After visiting that house, I started to think about my so-called problems. My home life wasn't always great. I don't get everything I want, and I fight with my brothers and sisters at times. But I realized that the only reason my family does the things they do is because they care, not like that one girl, who has it so rough.

I also realized that I'm not the only one who has problems. Everyone has them, and some have worse problems than me. I think that must have been what, whoever turned me into that fly, wanted me to see and experience, because the next day, when I woke up in the moring, I was my old self again. I was no longer a fly. My life now is one hundred percent better since my metamorphosis.

Pat Riffe DeMotte, Indiana Kankakee Valley High School

It Never Will Be the Same

Sometimes I sit and dream about the way it was when spring filled the air and past summers were treasured Everything so perfect, love was everywhere It never will be the same

You looked so beautiful dressed in white but somehow it seemed that bluejeans and a bandana would have been more like you The way you would have wanted it

I didn't like the smell in there It wasn't you either, too many flowers sent with love from everyone We all cared about you

When we were small we had so much fun together beating each other up telling on each other Remember?

You taught me how to fight You always could you know "Stay away from them, you'll get a bad name" And I did, 'cause I knew you were right

Mom would go shopping We always had to get the same thing Remember those purple leotards? I laughed when you wore them to school

You never did that well in school But you were smart maybe not bookwise But you taught me a lot

Taught me how to be myself "Don't worry about what other people think, they're not gonna have to live with you . . . you are"

You used to make me big dinners cause I was so lazy Steak and potatoes, remember the yogurt? I miss that so much

Oh, but I'm eating good I'm gonna gain weight like you wanted me to Really I'm gonna do it I promise

I wish you were here so I could read this to ya You'd probably laugh and say that it was good But you've passed on and I can't

Sometimes I sit and dream about the way it was when spring filled the air and past summers were treasured Everything so perfect, love was everywhere It never will be the same

Regina Skinner Portage, Indiana Portage High School

Time

The record's words drifted slowly into her consciousness . . . Nose pressed to the window, she watched the intricate flakes flowing from the sky. Unmoved she sighed deeply.

The lanterns piled high with snow gave an elegant picture card appearance Yet the thrill that winter always gave her was gone . . .

Something was wrong . . . Still untouched, she pinched herself. What could it be? Was it old memories come back to haunt her? As she flipped through old pictures

and clippings, she understood. So long ago, eons of time passed,

yet the thrill was still there. A dull aching pain;

How she dreamed of going back . . . She loved her friends, yet, it wouldn't be the same. Realization ran through her . . . a cold sharp pain. Silently, tears slid down her cheeks She felt old, so old . . .

The record's words were slightly ironic.

". . . . the way we were."

Paula Corrigan

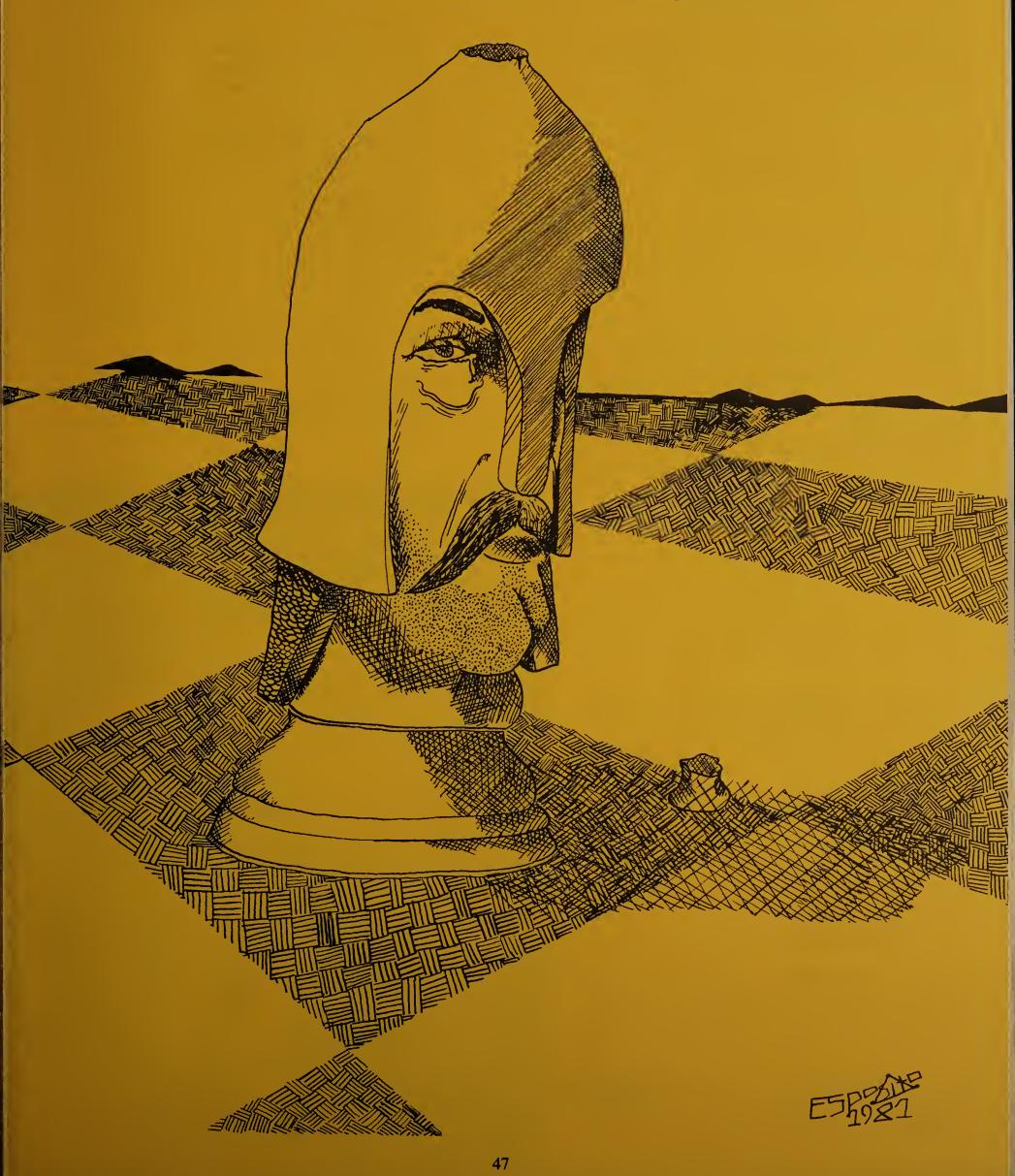
South Holland, Illinois Elizabeth Seton High School

Night and Day

The morning sits outside afraid until my mother draws the shade. Then, it bursts in like a ball, Splashing sun all up the wall. And evening is not night, Until she tucks me in just right, Kisses me and turns out the light. Oh! If my mother went away, Who would start the night and day?

Sandra Benoit Hammond, Indiana Spohn Middle School

"Your Move" by Michael Esposito, Portage High School



The End

Everything was normal in city and town
But soon buildings and lives would crumble down.
Because of a flaw in communication
An alarm buzzes throughout the nation.
Immediately upon hearing worldwide news
An impulse pushes a button that sets off a fuse.
War had begun though it shouldn't have started
And now awful nuclear warheads have darted.
Destruction of life and property follows.
The planet earth practically hollows.

And then . . .

She awakes after a frightful night.

She looks around at the awful sight.

Seeing lifeless bodies she starts to cry

A scream of terror but no reply.

She sees she is the sole survivor of the strife.

Finding no one alive she ends her own life.

But in the distance a scream proves someone alive,

Alone he does not want to survive.

Next comes his tragic death.

On earth there is not a single breath.

Existence could have possibly gone on again

But the fear of isolation ends the reign of all men.

Deanne Wachel Munster, Indiana St. Thomas More School

The Tree

The swaying tree, so full and silent, bigger than me. Standing there, till the end of time.

Lisa Dywan Munster, Indiana Eads School

I'm a Fighter

You said you really cared for me, I guess I had to wait and see. We've had our share of fun, But now it's over and done. I don't understand why, But it's time we said good-bye. I'll really miss your touch, And probably you very much. Now I'm all alone, Missing the twinkle your eyes always shone. I guess what we had was just a myth, And everything is over and done with. It will hurt me some. For a while I will be numb. Don't think this is it, Because I'm not about to give up and quit. I'm not gonna curl up and die, I'm a fighter and I'm alive.

Tammy Topor
Highland, Indiana
Highland High School



John Bolinger

One Chance

Here I lie,

In blackened dreams.

Wondering if it all,

Is what it seems.

My soul is restless,

And decides to fly.

As it left,

It kissed my cheek good-bye.

I am young,

And I don't want to go.

But I must leave my lifeless body,

I'm trapped by an angry soul.

Up

UP, I'll never come back.

I look at my body,

As it's lying there.

Will anyone cry,

Will anyone care?

UP

UP

I fly thru the air, Till my body is out of sight.

My soul shivers,

From the crisp cold night.

I look at my house,

And start to cry.

Why must I leave,

Why must I die?

My soul talked to me,

And starts to explain.

Why do you want to live,

Your live is full of pain.

You don't have many friends,

And the world is cruel.

It is one big factory.

And you are just a tool.

Why should you live,

Don't you want to die?

Death is the best way,

If not, tell me why.

I pleaded with my soul,

Please let me explain.

There's twice as much joy,

For every bit of pain.

And there is someone who cares.

Laura, my wife.

She's my love, my everything,

She's my reason for life.

Oh, I'd give anything,

To hold her somehow.

But it's too late.

There's no turning back now.

My soul said, "There is a way,

If you promise not to tell."

You still have a chance,

To escape the fires of hell.

We must return to your bed,

Where your body still lay.

Before someone finds out,

That you've been away.

To return before I'm touched,

Is all I need to do,

Don't worry Laura,

I'm returning home to you.

I'm

returning

We flew very swiftly,

As the night turned to dawn.

I see my beautiful Laura,

As she awakes with a yawn.

She turns her head towards me,

Oh, how sweet is her smile.

She lays her head down,

To look at me for awhile.

I'll be there soon,

And my eyes will open wide.

Oh, she looks so sweet,

Lying by my side.

My wait is almost over,

And I am nearly there,

As she raises her tender hand,

To run across my hair.

LAURA, NO!!!!!

David Hagan

West Lafayette, Indiana

Unspoken Fear

Your Secret Wish

The cloud

electric

Fragile

As a gossamer web

Unbroken

By the winds of time.

Alive

In your heart, Bound to itself—

Alive but still.

Untold

Like a whispered promise.

Breathe it

Soft as mist.

Breathe it Feel it

Live it

It will be yours.

silent and foreboding-

Thick as smoke

enveloping

Murky fingers

squeeze life's breath strangle vitality

Hanging

like The Sword

Threatening

Everpresent

Linda Nethery Munster, Indiana

It Give You Something to Think About

"If I was to move I'd go back to Clairton, Pa. It's a small town one of which everybody knows everybody. It's also a town of many whites but there was little trouble between black and white. But the thing that set Clairton and Gary so far apart is crimes. In Clairton if a young person was put in jail he was always let go in a few hours. But I heard that young people here is kept in jail for five days or more. Out of all the time I was living there there were no robberys and if there were none they was due to out-of-

towners. Gangs in clairton we may have heard about them and that was it to. But don't get me wrong we also had our fights but we alwayed used our fists never a gun you no the only gun I seen was worn by a police man. I've never held a real gun in my hand. Till this day I still haven't. It give you something to think about."

—Student essay in my English class, West Side High School Gary, Indiana

it give you something to think about that cruel time in a cruel place with winter death over everything and frozen people and frozen frowns and sterile corridors with herds of youth and smatterings of old staring listlessly at cracks called windows

(and on the first day a boy was shot dead on the street right outside the school at lunchtime and I wanted to cry but I only put my hand to my cheek and rubbed it slowly and wondered at the world)

and I was impotent
and I knew it
and instead of growing I shrank
and shriveled and pondered and withdrew into myself
and with anguished pleas to myself at night
bent over compositions and lesson plans
I cried out that this was not to be
that it could not be

that I was not meant to teach in schools where on the first day a boy is killed outside the school at lunchtime that I was meant for something else that I had to get away it was all too much with me and I had to flee it gave me too much to think about

and all those still alive who couldn't write yet who could could not fill my desires or fill my dreams but stared like posters propped up while I tried to talk to them while I think they tried to answer

in my school nobody was ever shot or even knifed or rarely smacked on the jaw with a fist we were gentler getting ulcers and red in the face and the thoughts of anyone being killed right in the street at lunchtime was not thought



M. Toth

but three thousand four hundred students give you something to think about thundering through hallways every fifty five minutes on the way to the jon on the way to the next class on the way out the side door because school is a drag

and I felt such a drag myself and I tried but I couldn't try any longer and I gave up and I said it wasn't like other places other times and where was the peaceful night that I could sit on my porch and speak of love and joy but instead I was sitting in my one room cardboard flat with memories and the crying in the wind reminding me of the cold outside

and I fled not the least because the boy was killed outside the school on the first day of the year at lunchtime and I could not cry but instead put my hand to my cheek and rubbed it wondering and saying to myself:

it give you something to think about

John Sherman Santa Fe, New Mexico Reprinted with permission of John Sherman and International Reading Association

Simple Things

I'd rather talk with a man, Dressed like a bum, That spoke from his heart, That hadn't gone numb.

Than speak with a man, All fancied and clean That spoke from his head, Like a twisted machine.

I'd rather listen to one, That spoke his own mind, Than one struggling, To remember his lines.

I'd rather be in poverty, And speak this way, Than be affluent, And have nothing to say.

W. J. Arneth Belmar, New Jersey

Belonging

Kara sat watching the smoke from her first cigarette in three years curl upward to join the dense blanket of smoke which hung over the entire room. It had been many years since she had been in this type of bar, and she was nervous. She imagined the cigarette made her look less conspicuous sitting there all alone. Out of the corner of her eye she could occasionally see a man watching her, and she would silently pray that he wouldn't approach her. If he hesitated when walking past, she refused to look at him, and her eyes remained glued to the sequined shirt of the band's lead singer. She wore what she hoped was an amused smile to give the impression that she was enjoying herself and didn't mind sitting alone in a group of single people. When a drunk staggered over to her table, she silently cursed Rachael for accepting an invitation to dance. After all, it had been Rachael's idea to come here. It had been almost ten years since Kara had hung out in bars, and she was no longer comfortable in them.

As a surprise for her birthday, Kara's husband had suggested that she pay a weekend visit to Rachael. He had noticed her increasing agitation with the children and hoped that two days of quiet would calm her. Kara was thrilled at the prospect of seeing her best friend and had eagerly anticipated two days of marvelous freedom. Now she thought perhaps she had made a mistake. This was Rachael's world; Kara's days were made up of housekeeping and children. There was probably not another person in this room who led a duller life, so why had Rachael brought her here?

A slurred greeting from the drunk who had sat next to Kara interrupted her thoughts. "What's happening?" he asked.

Oh God, thought Kara, they haven't improved the lines since I've been out of circulation. "You're drunk," she replied curtly as she searched the crowd for Rachael's dark hair. It wasn't like her to be rude, but she had forgotten how to handle these situations. Kara's attitude had no immediate affect on the man, but eventually he tired of being ignored and stumbled off to another table. Kara allowed herself to relax a bit and lit another of Rachael's cigarettes. She was beginning her second drink, and her nerves were being eased by the alcohol. Rachael returned

to the table fleetingly between dances and encouraged Kara to loosen up and have a good time. Easy for her to say, thought Kara. What do I have in common with any of these people? After nine years of marriage and three children, I just don't belong anymore. It's been so long since I've talked about anything other than kids that I don't know what to say.

Kara continued to nurse her drink and hardly noticed when a tall, blonde, young man stopped beside her. "You look lonely," he said. He stood without swaying and didn't seem to be drunk, so Kara admitted that her friend had deserted her, but quickly added that she was not lonesome. He smiled uncertainly, and Kara turned her attention back to the band. "May I sit down?" he finally asked. Kara became flustered and merely shrugged her shoulders as he took the seat next to her.

After exchanging names—his was Rob—they falteringly discussed politics and discovered they did not share the same views at all. Kara was not surprised that he took such a liberal stance. It was only in the last couple of years that Kara had become more conservative. She wondered if that came naturally with age. The drinks had emboldened her, and she asked him how old he was. "I'm twenty-two," he answered. After gazing at her for a few minutes, he ventured, "And you're about twenty-five."

He looked hurt by her laugh, and she became quiet. "I'm thirty-one," said Kara.

"It's been nice knowing you," she imagined him saying. Instead, he said earnestly, "You're beautiful."

Kara could feel her face getting hot and hoped the low lighting would hide the color she was certain had risen in her cheeks. He seemed to sense her embarrassment and added, "I mean it." When Kara still did not respond, he stammered, "I—I think you're a very attractive lady."

Kara searched his eyes for any hint of mockery. Finding none, she explained, "It's not necessary to use those worn out lines on me. I heard them all ten years ago."

He gazed at her intently and smiled. "You don't think I really stopped to talk just because you looked lonely do you? I just didn't know what else to say. But I knew I had to meet you."

Kara thanked him and motioned for the waitress to bring her another drink. Rob seemed to be sincere, and his compliments were welcome. Perhaps her suspicion stemmed from the fact that her husband rarely flattered her anymore, and she had begun to wonder if she deserved it.

As both of them relaxed, their conversation became less strained, and they continued to talk and joke until the lights were turned up and the chairs were being placed on top of the tables. Rachael appeared and disappointedly announced that it was time to go home. She glanced curiously at Rob and told Kara she would wait for her in the car. For the second time that evening, Kara was annoyed with her friend. She had wanted to say a simple goodbye and disappear with Rachael. When she stood, Rob held her coat as she quickly shrugged it on and gathered her purse and gloves. He walked with her into the parking lot, and Kara stopped when she spotted Rachael's car. "I have to go now," she said.

"I really enjoyed talking to you," he mumbled.

"I'm glad I met you too," Kara said, "and thank you." He didn't ask what she was thanking him for, but Kara doubted that he understood. As she turned to leave, he gently caught her arm. Before she could object, he had pulled her face to his and lightly brushed his lips against hers. He said goodnight and walked away. Kara was stunned for a moment, but soon the cold air encouraged her to move toward Rachael's waiting car. As she walked, she lifted her chin, pulled back her shoulders, and a grin spread slowly across her face.

Deborah Solivais Hobart, Indiana



Today a feast was given for my eleventh year Tables wide as the desert bloomed flowers There were pyramids of almonds and dates to unbuild At dark the guests were locusts tarrying When the moon teased we chased it into the garden I unswaddled your gift from its linens A bronze smiling mirror Together we breathed on its polished face In twined breath we made the sign beloved Then we erased our secret

Bernice Fleisher New York, New York lights come on.

Weldon Kees "Place of Execution"

This emptiness that pulls me from myself, that leaves my hand poised above paper words lost to air, and thoughts too fragmented to capture this movement of my feet from room to room as though in search of something definite.

Julie Fratrik New Hope, Pennsylvania

The Modern Poet

For a week, I had been thinking about writing this essay, but I could not find an opening. Last night, as I entered the pre-sleep theta state, my unconscious released it. "The poet has the mind of a piano, but the piano does not have the mind of a poet."

I was most impressed, in grammar school days, by Leigh Hunt's "Abou Ben Adhem." The beauty of language and philosophy was the groundwork for the appreciation of other poets I later read, loved, and respected.

In this poem, upon learning his name was not listed as one who loved the Lord, Abou speaks to the Angel: "Write me as one that loves his fellow men." The Angel wrote, and vanished. The next night It came again with a great wakening light And showed the names whom love of God had blessed And lo! Ben Adhem's name led all the rest.

As time passed and I became familiar with other immortal poets, their philosophy became indelibly printed upon my mind:

Let me not to the marriage of true minds Admit impediments. Love is not love Which alters when it alteration finds, Or bends with the remover to remove;

Shakespeare

Stone walls do not a prison make, Nor iron bars a cage;

Lovelace

They also serve who only stand and wait.

Milton

Oh, wad some Pow'r the giftie gi'e us To see oursels as ithers see us!

Burns

While there is life, there's hope.

John Gay
I am the master of my fate;
I am the captain of my soul.
W. E. Henley

I could go on and on with our famous quotations.

I reached the peak of poetic penetration and significance when my eldest son was graduated from high school. I purchased a card for my husband and myself to present to Steve, along with our gift to him. Rudyard Kipling's "If" filled both pages of the inside of the card.

During the graduation exercise, a young lady in cap and gown was called to the dais, and as she commenced to read "If," I turned my head to where Steve was seated with the rest of the graduates. Our eyes caught and held for one brief moment—a soul-stirring moment that will live forever in my heart.

It was quite natural for me when I became seriously interested in writing poetry to favor a philosophical theme. However, I found myself restricted as I wrote only with rhyme and meter. I knew that if I were to become a modern poet, it would be necessary to free my verse.

I enrolled in a poetry writing course at a local university, and although I learned modern methods of poetry writing, I had an extremely unpleasant reaction to the professor, for he used obscenity and cynisism not only in every day speach, but in writing and teaching poetry as well.

As I became increasingly aware that many of the undergraduates were adopting his methods of expression, my blood ran cold. I could not help but compare this situation to Hitler's influence of madness upon the German people.

Knowing with all my heart that this type of language was not poetic, I, nevertheless, felt compelled to consult Webster's dictionary. A poet was defined as "one endowed with great imaginative, emotional, or intuitive power and capable of expressing his conception, passion or intuition in appropriate language."

Recently, I received, upon request, a free copy of a tabloid composed mainly of modern poetry. Although a few poems were philosophical in theme, they were overshadowed by profane language. I could not help but recall what C. C. Colton wrote: "Subtract from many modern poets all that may be found in Shakespeare and trash will remain." I was overcome by sadness for Hunt, Shakespeare, Milton, Burns, Lovelace, Kipling. And, yes, for myself too.

Shirley Rodis Trumbull, Connecticut

View

South Shore

West-bound,
rails clank time
to the sway
of a worn conductor,
years filling the cracks
in his face
like dirt caked in the
meeting of faded walls.

Grimed windows mock yellowed photographs alternating from huddled neighborhoods to scabbed earth, laced with scrap iron and tin.

Now and then a rotted stop sweeps past carrying silhouetted riders out of the bustle, the heyday of youth. The youth of gleaming chrome and glowing faces pressed against windows, when stops were called in a strong, clear voice. when growing was fresh, and wealth was golden, and infatuation was in everyone's eyes.

As I see it. our duty as rational human beings is to gain an accurate understanding by analysis of the aspects. Example: without assuming the existence of but it's better not even to acknowledge it by name of course proceed by examining each of these, let's say, particles. and determine their composition, record their exact location. Survey then, the shifting border between these particles and that flowing substance. And only after all the data has been collected, correlated, and interpreted, can we safely assume that this formation is what it appears to be. Caution Must Be Exercised! The validity of the conclusion is dependent upon consensus of other investigations

Flying

Spaces

between clouds
breathe blue.
Trees reach
like jazz hands
to stroke
a dune swallow
brushing its wings
across the sun.

Legacy

If there were breath enough
in this being,
it would embrace
the sea's labor
and further,
to the birth
of our light.
It would dive
into the thirst
that is each,
that is one,
with that same sea.

If there were breath enough in this being, it would unearth foundations and mortar that give integrity. . . life.
It would interpret their essence—
a symphony of sound and light.

If there were breath enough
in this being,
it would wield
the power of suns
to realize a legacy
that echoes silently,
insistently,
ancient.
Then rest
would find
its ashes
drifting fulfilled
across some distant star.

E. Michael Maslar Schererville, Indiana

I Knew What I Wanted

"I wish I had a house like this," she said, standing in the entrance to the living room. Sophie, the dog I was taking care of, ran around our feet, jumping on us, glad to have company again.

"Look at all of these paintings!" she said, moving from one to another. "Is this house yours?"

I hesitated. What could I tell her? I could never own this old house with its oak trim and large, comfortable rooms. I was simply house sitting for a professor I once had—keeping the house warm and Sophie company while they were gone during Christmas break.

"Uh, I'm just renting it for awhile," I told her. "Belongs to a friend."

I watched her move around the large living room, looking at every picture, plant, and piece of furniture as if she were in a museum. What had I gotten myself into? All I knew about her for sure was that she was attractive and had large breasts. Just a few hours ago I had been sitting alone at a table where I had talked to Debbie—a woman I had met earlier.

It was late, I had been there too long. The waitresses weren't as businesslike then. Two or three would group together, talking and smoking for a few minutes, then going back to their tables. "Last call for alcohol," the disc jockey's voice rhymed from the house speakers. The music didn't stop.

Debbie had left with her roommates because she was going home to Chicago for Christmas break and had to get up early. Or so she said. You never know. Sitting there after she left, disturbed only by raising my glass and going to the restroom, I wanted to leave but was afraid I'd miss something. I knew what I wanted, and I would rather be drunk and sleepy than miss it.

I kept looking everyone over. There was still a fair amount of people on and around the dance floor. A few sitting against the wall. Silhouetted against the blazing dance floor was a frame partition for people to lean and set their drinks on. It corralled the dancers and those sitting close to the floor and had three wide openings allowing people in and out. One figure by itself was a female. Her hair was shoulder length and swept away from her face, which I could only see when she turned to look around.

I watched her for awhile. No one returned to her and I wondered if I had found something. I considered just standing next to her and waiting for her to speak, but I decided I shouldn't leave things to chance this time.

I walked up beside her, put my drink down, and before she could really see me, asked her to dance.

"No thanks. I don't feel like dancing right now."

Okay, honey. If you're waiting for something better to come around, forget it. I was disappointed. From the back and side she looked attractive. Admittedly, my attraction to her was primitive, primordial even.

I turned back to watching the flashing dance floor with its moving figures sprayed with different colored spotlights. As one song ended it overlapped with the next, passing the baton on without missing a beat. The Beat. The dead bass drum pushed things on. It was like the pulse of one of the dancers; it flowed fast, kicking them on and never stopping till closing time.

"Do you go to the university?" she asked me. I was excited once again; a woman doesn't turn you down to get rid of you and then ask you a question. She was interested in me.

"Yes, and you?"

She nodded her head and turned back to watching the dancers and the dance floor as if it were a bonfire.

"What are you studying?" she asked.

"You mean my major?" She nodded again.

"I'm in engineering." I didn't want to explain right then that I had been asked to leave the engineering school and was casting around for a job.

"When are you going home for break?" I asked, anxious to get away from me.

"Tomorrow. I'm from Houston."

I was surprised. While her accent sounded different to me, different, for example, compared to Debbie's, it didn't sound southwestern. I didn't argue, though; she knew where she was from.

"So how did you end up here in Indiana?"

She paused for a second. "I was in the Army and now they're paying me to go here."

"Oh, and what are you studying?" She shrugged her shoulders.

"General studies."

That didn't sound right. I had no idea what general studies was, but I was too tired to fight with it.

Her having been in the Army made me look at her face closely to see if she looked like a dike who had signed up so she could be masculine. She knew I was looking and pretended to watch the dance floor. The lights flashed on and off her face and my pupils tried to pulse with them. She seemed pretty and feminine in the colored darkness, but (and maybe this was only the lights) she had the calm-sad face of someone older than her age. She turned to me when she thought I had looked enough. I kept looking at her, trying to figure out why I thought she looked older and she kept looking at me. I was surprised. Usually when you stare at people you don't know, they shy away. Not her.

"How old are you?" she asked.

I glanced at her face and added another year onto my age. "I'm twenty-four. How old are you?"

"Twenty-four." She turned, facing me. "You don't look twenty-four."

"You don't either. You look younger."

"Really?" she said, smiling.

"Really." I hesitated for a second. "Do you come here often?" I asked. I was embarrased I had to resort to this, but I didn't know what else to say.

"Some. A lot of college kids come here. A friend of mine and I just came in to look around."

"I don't know your name."

"I'm Pam."

"I'm Neal. Did you change your mind about dancing?" It seemed as if all our lines were on flash cards. I held up a worn-out card and she matched it with a dog-eared response.

"No thanks," she said, wistfully this time. "I'd like to but I'm drunk. I don't want to embarrass myself."

"You think they're not drunk too?"

"I know, but I don't want to." She looked at me, seeing if I understood. We silently watched the dancers, letting the music replace talk.

"I want another drink," she said after a few minutes. "You want to go down to the River Road Lounge? They stay open a little later."

"Sure. Where's your friend."

"What?"

"Your friend. The one you came with."

"Oh, I misunderstood you. She just dropped me off here."

Hmmm, the girl seemed confused sometimes, but I had a woman to drink with and she seemed nice, so I got my coat and we walked out. She looked back at the door as we heard it shut.

"The guy I came with kind of looked at me. I guess this isn't very nice," she said, laughing. "Don't worry. There's nothing between him and me. He just gave me a ride over from a party."

It wasn't my business as long as I didn't get punched by a boyfriend, so I shrugged my shoulders. I wondered if I should suggest going to my house since I had some beer and a bottle of wine waiting in the refrigerator—that would impress her. A bottle of wine, a nice old house, and a fireplace. But that seemed too pushy. Maybe after we were a little drunker.

As we got in the car she said: "It's kinda strange, a girl being out by herself, huh?" as if she hoped I was shocked.

"Oh, I don't know," I said. "You see more women out by themselves now." Not too many, she insisted, and I agreed.

When we went into the bar, I asked her what she wanted. She said no, she'd buy and asked me what I wanted. When we first walked it, we, Pam in particular, were looked over and forgotten. When she ordered for both of us, the collegiate-dressed males first looked up at her and then back at me to see what kind of guy she was with.

We played pinball, and I watched her as she flicked the flippers. Pam was attractive but so was Debbie. What was the difference? Both seemed sure of themselves, but in different ways. Debbie seemed proud of her education, dropped me bits of her specialty, but Pam never mentioned school. She just seemed as if nothing surprised her.

One of the pinballs tapped leisurely on a post and gravity held it there. She skillfully pushed her stomach against the table, leaning on it just enough so the ball rolled loose but the board didn't yell tilt.

"Nice, very nice," I said as she shot the ball to the top of the table, letting it filter down again.

"You bet," she laughed, punching me lightly in the stomach, then pulling away when she realized her hand rested on my shirt and her chest lay against mine. After our change ran out, she asked, "Can you give me a ride home?"

"As soon as I finish my beer."

"It's across town."

"That's all right."

"I'll wait outside. I need some air," she said and walked out.

I wondered if she was going to try to find another guy. There were plenty of young males there with cars and glistening with money. I was always aware that she could leave at any second; she wasn't bound to me in any way except that she might be interested in me. I became anxious to find out if she had left with someone, but I made sure not to hurry my drink: if she wanted someone else, then there was no way I could keep her. It was after three in the morning and last call when I walked out. She was standing under the eavesdrop, watching the lonely cars on the street straggle by.

"All right," I said after I started the car. "Where are we going?"

"It's in that addition behind the old mall. Do you know where that is?"

I nodded. I knew where it was. My parents had lived in an identical subdivision across the street and a few blocks down. It wasn't a bad neighborhood; it was just a lot of National Homes boxes cemented into every open space the streets and sidewalks didn't take up.

"Do you have some roommates?" I asked, using a collegiate term.

"My two younger sisters moved up from Houston. They both work in the mall. The older one just got moved up to assistant manager at her store.

"And where do you work?"

"Williams Electric," she said. "Out on Newman Road."

I was amazed. How could she have time for school?

We pulled in front of her house, and she thanked me, then awkwardly paused for a second.

"Could I use your bathroom?" I asked—a sure way to get invited inside. As she found her key, she asked me what my name was again and repeated hers.



Kathy Deasy

"You'll have to be quiet. My sisters have to work this morning."

I looked around the small living room with its two couches covered with sheets and the portable T.V. sitting on a plastic table. "Don't look at the house, it's a mess. Nobody has time to clean," she said. There were several toys scattered over the room and a sweeper plugged in. She saw me looking at them. "I have a little boy," she told me. She picked up a framed school picture of a boy and showed me. "Not bad, huh?"

"How old is he?"

"Seven. His name is Troy."

In the bathroom I thought about Troy and Pam. She had to be around seventeen when she had him. As I came out, I heard the radio softly playing in the kitchen.

"Would you like to stay a while?" she asked, emphasizing the "a while" so I wouldn't bring in my suitcases, I guess. "I was going to fix some toast and eggs. Want some?"

She fixed the eggs and put them on the kitchen table which was an aluminum and wood picnic table covered with a table cloth. Afterwards she suggested we go into the living room.

She picked up a picture album on the table, asking would I like to see some pictures. I saw birthdays, Memorial days, Christmases, Fourth of July's, and I saw a baby becoming bigger and, when she was in them, Pam growing older even faster than her son. The pictures were taken in spurts; four or five of the same people in the same clothes and then the next holiday came around for another spurt.

"Nice," I told her at the end of the book. I thought about leaving, but there was still a chance for something to happen. I skittishly slid my fingers along her shirt until they entertwined with hers.

"I can tell you don't work with your hands," she said, rubbing her finger tips along mine.

"Are they that soft?"

"Yeah. I imagine mine feel all rough and dried out. It's the chemicals we have to use to get our hands clean."

I started sliding my arm around her waist. She acted as if she didn't feel it, and I was ready to pretend I was straightening the cushion when she leaned forward, allowing my arm to slip around her.

"You don't look twenty-four," she said into my ear.

"I can show you some ID's," I told her. "Why are you obsessed with age?"

"Because I'm old," she said as I draped her hair away from her face. She touched her face suddenly. "I just wish I didn't have these worry rashes."

"What are they?"

"Rashes you get from worrying too much."

I leaned over to kiss her, but she didn't offer her face. In the light from the kitchen we looked at each other. She looked older than twenty-four. There seemed to be dark quarter moons under her eyes, and there might have been a rash along her cheeks but I couldn't tell in the faint light.

Suddenly she pulled away from me, gathering herself in one corner of the couch. "Neal, you're going to have to go. My sister gets up soon for work."

"We've got plenty of time."

"No. I just can't." She watched as I straightened up off the couch. "Listen, it's not that I don't find you attractive or that I don't want to fool around with you. It's just that it wouldn't be cool. One of my family could walk in here at any time. Okay?"

I picked up my coat, and we stood looking at each other by the door. "We could go back to the west side," I suggested.

"No, I...," she stopped. "Well, I would like to see where you live."

So now I watched as Pam looked over the house, pleased that she was impressed. I walked into the kitchen to make coffee as she halted by the china cabinet, looking at the unused porcelain.

"If you make coffee, I'll make a fire, all right?"

She smiled because I was romantic enough to want a fire. Later she came in with two cups of coffee as the fire shot upward out of sight in swordlike flames.

The fire was bright and flashing, more so than the dance floor we had left a few hours ago. It seemed like last weekend I had seen Pam outlined by the lights. Now she was sitting next to me, watching the fire. We sat for a long time in silence. The fire and the alcohol and the late-night tiredness mesmerized us, not letting us waste words.

"Why did you leave Houston?" I finally asked.

"It was too big a place. I didn't know anyone there."

"Your parents live there?"

"My father does." She stared at the fire. "For a while we weren't talking too much, so I stayed away from there." She paused, then said. "Troy's father and me were never married. It was hard for Daddy to forget about that. . . . , but he's got a grandson now, so he doesn't bring it up any more. Or very often, at least." She made herself laugh.

I nodded agreement that things like that could happen. We were both sleepy, staying awake because we had passed the point where sleep would come easily, surprisingly sober for having drunk so much. Pam held the coffee cup under her chin, letting the steam feel her face. She seemed sad and regretful that she had told me one of her secrets. Ever since I had seen Troy's picture I had been thinking about her having a baby at seventeen. I also though about Dawn. Pam was who Dawn would have been if she had had the baby. I often wondered if the child was a boy or a girl. We were both nineteen then, and we decided we would have another one when we were married and had careers. I didn't tell Pam about all this though.

"Like to see the rest of the house?" I asked.

We went upstairs and down the hallway. "This is one of the daughters' bedrooms. And this is the other girl's room. That one is the master bedroom."

"I wish I had this many bedrooms."

"I spend a lot of time here," I told her, pushing the study door open.

"Wow, look at all of these books!" She gushed as if she were a little girl. "How many of these have you read so far?" she asked, laughing at the huge number surrounding us.

"Oh, some."

I watched her bending down to look at the book's titles. It seemed like a painting: "Woman Kneeling," it should be called. Her smoothly curving hips and breasts made a sensual form with one side of her face towards me. Pam looked clear and sharp in the bright overhead light.

"Is all this stuff yours?"

I hesitated. I could make up a short story. Instead I told her, "It belongs to a friend of mine. He's a professor.

"Oh, so you'll have to move out when school starts again?"

I nodded.

"That's too bad." She knelt by

another bookcase. "What does your professor teach?"

"English."

"All he has is poetry and novels and books about books." She ran a finger carelessly along the book spines. "I thought you said you were an engineer."

"I'm not an engineer yet." I didn't want to lie to Pam, but I couldn't explain that I had been kicked out for bad grades and "unsatisfactory" attitude.

Pam sat in a ragged easy chair, looking out the large window at the lightless houses around us. She sat for awhile, then said offhandedly: "I always wanted to go to college."

Dawn had always been honestly blunt like that, a skill I never did achieve. Maybe that's why she said she "just didn't feel good" being around me anymore.

I walked aimlessly towards the desk, remembering Pam in the study's bright overhead light. She wore no makeup, only a little sadness and tiredness covered her face. She wasn't beautiful, but she was attractive to me.

I wanted her now because she was there and I probably would never see her again. I went to the desk and turned on the small reading lamp, then flipped off the ceiling light. Moving beside the old easy chair, I leaned towards Pam to kiss her. She was asleep, her body collapsed against one side of the chair.

Shit. My hand had reached out to wake her when I wondered what to say to her; maybe tell her she'd have to stay all night, I'd take her home when I went to work—even though I didn't have a job.

I stood looking at Pam. She slept completely motionless with her arms and legs oddly bent, lying where they had fallen asleep, too tired to even pull them up to her body to keep warm.

It was strange how I kept thinking of Dawn.

After watching Pam for a few minutes more, I got a blanket off one of the girls' beds, covering her as well as I could. Then I went to sleep in my own bed.

Ken Morris Lafayette, Indiana

After Love on an August Night in the City

Spent, merged haunch to heel, While crickets and voices carry downwind And motorcycles rape the pristine stillness of the night, We clasp our hands and settle our fingertips Into tiny pools of skin on skin.

Ourselves—our selves—ebb slowly outward,
Pulled roughly back into the nubby tweed of night.
Last lingering reminiscent hand on hip,
Our interwoven sigh is lost in revving engines, tomcat screams
And silky branches scratching at the screen.
We back to back and separate
While sirens loop their barbed and spiny shrill
Throughout our ears
And intermingle with the settling shards of silence
That surround our bed.

Joyce Jonap Townsend Cleveland, Ohio

Mexico 1962

An Absence of Joy dominated the sky like clouds. The sun fading, losing brilliance. . . Black birds, flying to trees, sang to loafing children, Who played gambling games. . .

Along a curb, a man pensive, silent, riding on a bicycle, His wife by his side. . . Both ignoring the World. . . Neither hearing if there's a message from the sky.

A truck, having made a fast delivery, hoping
To make it back on time. . .

Loses control for a second. . .

There isn't time to stop. . .

The birds, the children, unaware a specter has come. . .

A bicycle lies twisted, a wheel still spinning. . . The man, dying, acknowledges the end through suffering. . . The wife, hoping to tear life from her breasts. . . Fearing living life alone.

She cries in hysteria, always conscious of disaster. . . Pounding the pavement, losing self-control. . . Afraid of being abandoned.

She wept for days. . .
Some said she later went crazy.
The truck driver, too scared to stop. . .
Too far to catch.
This vision still follows me.

Jesus A. Gutierrez Gary, Indiana

A Box of Chocolates

When his young wife suddenly died, John left town. He went away the same night, at a time when the sleeping community looked like a deserted village. He couldn't bear to live there now that she was gone.

John surmised that no one saw him leave because no one had called out to him or tried to stop him. Anyway, it was in the dead of night, and the neighbors must have been sound asleep. . . .

He was very quiet and made no sound that could arouse anyone. John had to take his three-year-old daughter with him. There wasn't any reason for her to remain any longer in the company of her dead mother! She couldn't speak gently to her or fondle her blonde curls. . . or take care of her wants. . . .

He had said calmly: "Come on, we're leaving.'

So little Francine followed him. The child was already dressed and had been sleeping on the dismantled dark sofa in the front room. Since her mother's unlooked-for illness only a short time ago, when her father had come home to surprise her with a box of chocolates, she had stayed in the parlor bewildered, eating chocolates from the same box her mother had. It had been daddy's present to Mommy. It was so thoughtful of him to do that, and they tasted so delicious. Mommy had been full of smiles when he handed her the box of chocolates because she was always so fond of sweets. She was asleep now. . . and, of course, daddy didn't want to wake her, so she had to stay home and couldn't go out with them.

A slow-moving car passed them as they walked on the road, but John didn't try to get a lift. The driver would have probably picked him up, moved with pity at the sight of little Francine tagging along. She was a sweet little blonde-haired girl.

"I'm tired, Daddy," the child moaned some time later.

John picked up the child in his arms. The gray dust on her black shoes polka-dotted his dark pants with the grime of the road, but he didn't seem to care. He continued walking, not fast, just at what would be called a "leisurely" pace. The child was very light and didn't hamper him in any

way. He could have walked at a faster speed and never felt the weight of Francine.

In the lengthening shadows that fell before them in the moonlit road, John could discern the hand of his little girl rubbing her eyes sleepily. She was attempting to fight off her intense drowsiness and stay awake. She had a chocolate in the other small hand. It seemed so large a candy in comparison to her diminutive clutching fingers.

John had left the house with the door open and without bringing anything with him. Everything in the house had been left intact. He had abandoned it just as it was at the time his wife expired. It wasn't too clean because she hadn't done much housework for a couple of weeks. She had been busy sewing curtains for the kitchen. The material was red batiste, a very fine cotton fabric, with a pattern of green and white flowers. Very cheerful. It would help enliven the dreary tan paint of the walls.

He could still see, in his mind's eye, the door open as he had left it. He could feel the passing cool breeze of

the odor of the back room where his young wife lay lifeless. . . .

A dead branch of a maple tree knocked over the cap he was wearing, and it rolled before him like an ominous object of destruction. The night and its shadows were beginning to play havoc with his imagination. He didn't retrieve the cap. He was almost fearful to touch it. It didn't resemble his cap anymore.

He realized he should have had his wife buried, made the necessary arrangements, but he just couldn't—he had to get away from the scene as fast as he could. He couldn't bear to see her there, dead. He readily assumed that a neighbor would eventually notice the open door of the house, would enter,



and take care of things. Maybe it wasn't fair of him to thrust the responsibility on someone else's shoulders, but he couldn't help it. And it wouldn't even be a relative. Why should anyone care? On the other hand, there's always a good side to everyone's nature, and he convinced himself someone would see to it that his wife was properly buried. She hadn't been a bad neighbor and had made no enemies. Everyone knew she went to church services every Sunday without fail. Of course, most of the time she arrived late when services were half over. but she made the effort nevertheless, and that rated some kind of merit.

Little Francine's curly head suddenly fell to one side, and John stopped in

his tracks. He hadn't been walking very long with her in his arms. On foot it was difficult to cover much distance, especially at the slow rate of speed he was going. He was probably not *too* far from home.

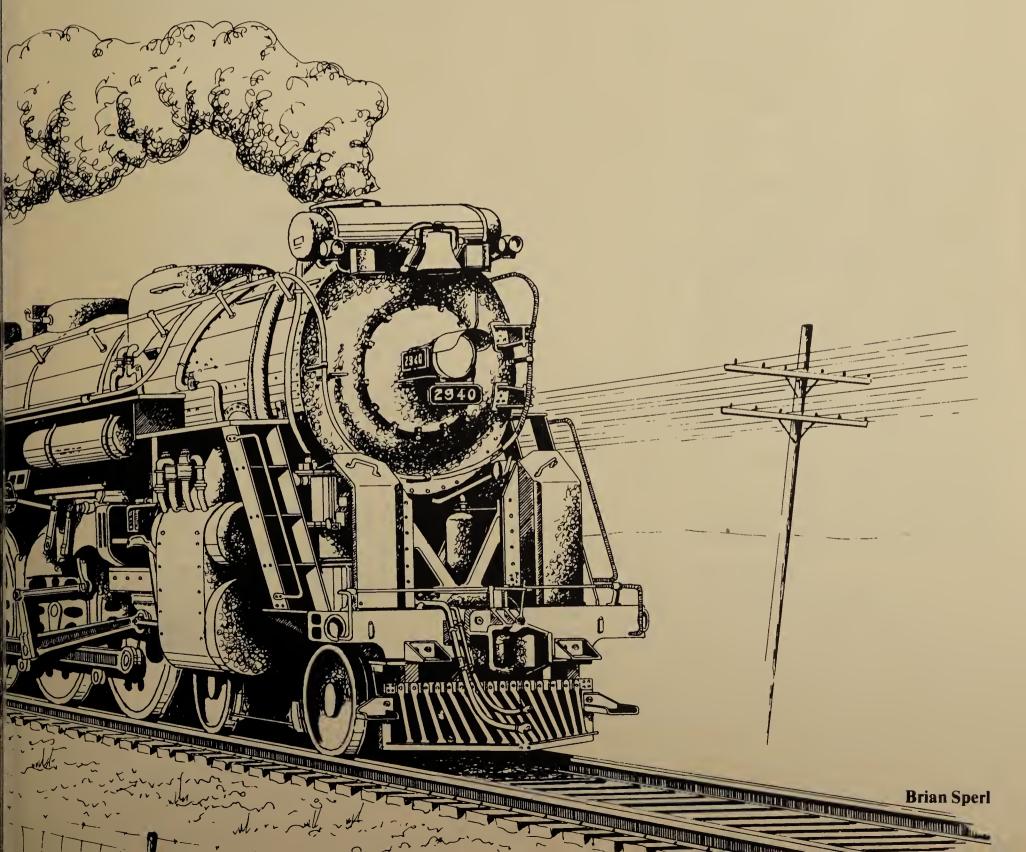
John sighed wearily as he laid the inert body of his daughter gently down on a patch of dried grass. It was soft and dry and smelled clean.

The chocolate Francine had been holding all this time had melted in the palm of her small hand, and in the dark, it seemed that she was grasping a strange black flower.

A light breeze ruffled the hem of her gingham dress. John thought of the ragged curtain on the door he had left open.

Without any more thought to contradict his impulse, he left her there and started on his way again. He felt he had to hurry to reach the destination he had in mind. He didn't have much time. He wanted to be in the next town by morning, far away from it all. If he felt hungry before then, he'd eat some chocolates he had in his pocket. He probably would have to eat them anyway. His wife had eaten them. So had little Francine.

Aline Musyl Marks Lincoln Park, New Jersey



These two pages contain poems that appeared in Skylark IV.

At this time we would like to give proper credit to authors Jimm White and Mary Boerman, who did not receive recognition last year.

I Knew You

You spoke to me in a dream and I knew you perfectly.
Your desires were as real as my own, and our minds touched, unrestrained, on identical plateaus of awareness.
The minute distance between any two souls was briefly gapped, leaving us momentarily free of ourselves, and at liberty to become one another.
We reached and made contact, spoke, and were heard, looked,

and discovered each other completely, and we were unconcerned about being known, or understood

A state of fused consciousness alienated us from everything but each other, and when I awoke, I knew where I had been, and I sensed that you were still near.

For Pedro

tired empty eyes peering through iron bars exposing the shallowness of a smile Lost in a hollow void of disillusion Where the promises and dreams that never materialized float about weightlessly. It must be painful to drift to your past and find no place to linger. You are old now—and you have aged graciously. I am amazed that in a world that has offered you so little and taken so much you cannot stop being kind. Yes the world has overlooked you, old one, For your lack of bitterness indicates a wisdom that I hope someday to acquire, and your tenderness, unscathed by disappointment, and unvengeful after gross injustice is a miracle beyond my comprehension.

Answers

It's funny

how answers come

when you are least expecting them.

Like pieces to a puzzle

that fall into place

just as you are about to admit it is unsolvable.

Somehow, you know

it's right, and you needn't roll it over in

your mind.

If it didn't belong— it wouldn't be

there.

Suddenly,

all the minor tragedies of life blend perfectly

into an endless comedy.

At last!

You can sit back

undisturbed

and marvel at its simplicity,

Wondering

why you ever doubted its existence.

After all

if there were no answers there would be no questions to begin with.

Greeting the Darkness

Greetings darkness.

At last we are alone

To conspire against the forces of reality.

The awareness of my isolation is complete

And I am content

within the folds of your sleeping shadows

It is safe to contemplate the nature of my rebellion.

I can justify

to myself

anything that I have done

and I need not offer explanations to a slumbering world.

It seems I am the only one immune to your spell of sleep

There is no one

to misinterpret my intentions;

or condemn by beliefs

and your silence leads me to assume that you are in approval

of me

you must be my one true friend.

I thank you, darkness

for consistently arriving every day.

I will take it as an omen

If you fail to appear one day,

And hold myself personally responsible.

Grandfather Sol

You provide us the warmest blanket,

That we might not be cold.

You bathe us in light,

That we may be clean.

You, the fearless provider,

Tending the crops that sustain us,

and asking no reward.

We,

a billion greedy grandchildren,

Suckling the breast of your favorite daughter,

Hungrily exploring her private areas,

Learning things we have no right to know,

A family of perverted scholars—ravishing our mother to quench our own thirst to rule.

I wonder if you know

that some of us are ashamed,

or grateful.

And when you take shelter behind dark clouds,

I sometimes walk through your gentle tears so that I

may be closer to your grief,

And share with you, the sorrow that is brought by your faithless children.

One moment I'm Sporty. The next I'm

IAmI

Subdued.
I'm a

Me

Clown.

I'm a

Philosopher.

I'm a well-rounded

Don't try to catalog

Square.

Don't limit me.

Because growing things

Need lots of room.

While Babysitting

Is it my turn? You ask with eyes shining And I feel like saying Yes, Stevie, it's your turn

And it can be your turn
All night

If you want.

I can tell you need my

Time.

We counted pegs
And identified colors

For fifteen straight minutes.

It was as if you were hypnotized With the attention you were getting.

When does disregard Become neglect

And child abuse?

Mary Boerman South Holland, Illinois

Jimm White Hammond, Indiana

The Hanging of Clayton "Biscuit" Wilson

He was a lean, hard looking man, with a face and body that seemed to have been used up by the arid desert, the dry winds and blistering suns. His eyes were mere slits now, and the stubble of his beard was shaded with dirt and grime. He sat his saddle defiantly, head held high, disdaining to even notice his captors. Three men sat watching with morbid fascination as a fourth man slipped the heavy hemp rope over his neck and jerked the knot tight.

As he moved back, he said to the man about to hang, "Tell old Buck howdy, 'Biscuit.' " Then he wacked the rump of the horse with his hand and yelled. The horse bolted and Clayton "Biscuit" Wilson swung lazily in the bright Texas sun, his feet kicking wildly, trying to climb invisible stairs.

The men sat there watching to the last twitch, their horses moving nervously about. One, a heavy, florid man with a bright blue bandanna clutched in his hand spoke to no one in particular, "He had it comin, if ever a man did."

"Lester, there ain't no cause to talk mean about old Biscuit, now that he's gone."

The big man looked at the speaker, a skinny, pale man with shiny, button eyes. He said, "Looky here, Munson, what that man did deserved hangin' a couple times over." Lester wiped his face again and shuddered. "When I think of what he did. . . ."

"Don't get me riled, Lester! I'm liable to cut him down and start all over again!" The third man sat on his horse staring at the still swaying body, the hate obvious in his face. Rafe Huggins was not the kind of man to forgive anything, and he would never forgive or forget what Biscuit Wilson did to him. Not ever.

The fourth man walked his horse over near the body and gave it a shove, starting the swinging motion all over again. Munson shouted, "What'd you do that for? That ain't Christian, Wiley! You got to treat the dead with respect. You can't. . . ."

"Aw, shut your face, Munson." Benson Wiley gave Munson a glare and then went back to watching the body swing. He was enjoying it almost as much as when Huggins had slapped the horse out from under Biscuit.

Lester Jamison wiped his face and asked, "Did I ever tell you about the night Biscuit invited me and the missus in special? Gave us a meal I'll never forget."

Munson's laugh was ugly. "Yeah, I reckon he gave a lot of folks some meals they'll never forget. He shore gave old Rafe a couple, didn't he?" The little man's button eyes were bright and the grin on his face was wide.

"You don't shut that prune face of yours up, Munson, I'm gonna make it uglier than it already is." Huggins watched the swaying body, fascinated with what he'd done, yet somehow angry that it was all over, that there was no more satisfaction than this.

Huggins leaned back in his saddle, looked at the others and said, "You boys ain't got nothin' to complain over. What Biscuit done to me will haunt me always. I'll always hate him for it."

"How'd he ever do it, Rafe? You don't get to town too often. I can understand how he got us, but you ain't into town more'n three times in a year."

Huggins looked at Munson and replied, "I got what some of you got: A special invite! I always ate at Biscuit's when I come to town. I've ate from his wagon before he come to town and set up his eatin' place. One day he gave me this special invite, sayin' I was his favorite customer, and he wanted to cook up somethin' special for me." He turned his head and spat in the general direction of the slow moving body. "Old Biscuit always served up the best meals around. Even when he was cookin' for the J-Bar, he was good."

Jamison said, "Ain't no denyin' that! I never had a biscuit 'til I bite into one of his! They'd melt into your mouth."

"Yeah, and how about his apple pies? I ain't ate a woman's pie like his. He knew how to do it, and I ain't ashamed to tell it." Munson was smiling at the memory.

Wiley said, "I heard you had some

pie that wasn't quite up to his normal level of excellence." He stared at Munson, a grin breaking as the other man's eyes widened and anger flushed his face.

"Well, that was the only time for me! Least ways I never ate regular like you did."

Wiley straightened, then muttered, "Yeah, I reckon you're right on that." He looked back to the body, nudged his horse over to it and gave it a shove. The creak of the rope and the groan of the tree limb drifted slowly over the short distance to the men.

Jamison said, "Rafe, you ain't told us what he give you. Was it his apple pie? Maybe them golden butter biscuits of his, huh? I get hungry just thinkin' of 'em."

Huggins said softly, "Steaks. Three of the thickest, juicest steaks a man ever laid eyes on." The man's eyes watered and he looked away quickly. His voice dropped to a mere whisper and he said, "I ate every one of 'em."

Jamison snapped, "Aw, you ain't the only one that ate some of Biscuit's stuff!" He pointed to Munson and said, "This jackass ate three pies and thought they was the best he ever ate."

Then, he pointed to Wiley and said, "Wiley here had some soup and asked for seconds, and me and the missus had broiled steaks and some kind of meat gravy." The thought was apparently too much for him and his eyes bulged and the large blue bandanna flew to his mouth. Tears brimmed in his eyes as everyone watched with anticipation.

Finally, Jamison settled down and said, "Munson here found out his pies was dog meat soaked in honey and steeped in molasses, then mixed with apples." He grinned as Munxon squirmed at the memory. He continued, "And Wiley there had a fine soup made out of pieces of old Rufus." Jamison added, "I'll never understand why Biscuit would harm an old dog like that."

"What about you, Jamison? What'd you get?" Huggins asked.

Jamison's eyes narrowed and he said weakly, "I don't know. All he'd do when I asked him in the jail was grin at me. Said I'd know, one day."

Wiley asked, "You ever eat regular at Biscuit's?"

Jamison shook his head. "No, just a few times when he first opened the place, and then that time we got the invite."

Munson said, "Ain't a soul in town but didn't eat some of Biscuit's stuff. The Dray sisters got sick on that dead gopher he served 'em; the Aikens boy ate them briney things that he thought was some kind of strange pickles, but was really a cat's tail." He grinned, then added, "They was a lot of folk taken with that cat's tail."

Jamison shook his head sadly and said, "Yeah, and may be old Biscuit might still have his life and still be settin' in jail if Owen had lived. That was a low down thing to do, serving the kid a dead horse's brains and calling it pudding."

Wiley said, "Well, Rafe here had him a good reason to want old Biscuit hung. Yes, sir, he had him cause. I don't think he'd have let old Biscuit live, even if Owen had lived."

Huggins had gone over to the body and given it another shove. Wiley continued, "Them three steaks Rafe had was off his donkey, Hector. The one that saw him through the prospectin' time."

Jamison exclaimed, "No! That was a low down thing to do."

Wiley said, "Yeah! Poor Rafe ain't got over it yet. I reckon he'd like to kill old Biscuit all over again. He loved that mule like a brother."

Munson's face wrinkled with thought and he looked curiously at Jamison. He asked, "Lester, exactly when was it you ate over at Biscuit's place?"

Jamison answered, "I reckon it was two weeks ago. A Friday, I believe." He thought for a moment, then added, "In fact, it was the day of Aunt Cynthia's funeral. You was there."

"Yeah, I remember. I also remember Biscuit standing by that casket a might long time."

Jamison's eyes widened and a fat hand flew to his pocket.

The blue bandanna was not quick enough.

Voyle A. Glover Gary, Indiana

There Is Time to Be Cheerful

On the back steps in the dawn light you put on your shoes while the collie nuzzles you ready to be sent for the cows. You yawn, watch the pigeons circle the barnyard as if tied to a string. You hear voices, familiar as dew, deep hog grunts, a calf crying for its mother, across the fields a neighbor's jackass honks for mares. You breathe the spirit of space, sound, feel the fresh stretch of earth's body. Beyond the honeysuckle hedge where ducks sleep head folded under wing, sun reflects from barn windows, the children's pony rubs its rump on a post. Fertile fields could make this morning talk in symbols but the fact of chores stirs your mind while in the kitchen a voice hums a breakfast tune. The odor of coffee, bacon frying rouses you to feed the farm's hunger. When you come from the barn the morning wears a flower face. You kiss your wife good morning.

The children in place at the table catch the contagion and laugh at your good morning, good morning festival.

You count the hour as a new start untouched yet by the day's anguish.

Outside the window the hollyhocks nod and each moment seems about to bloom. . .

James Hearst Cedar Falls, Iowa



Start to Finish

Walking in the desert, feeling a wind rising at his back, now running along with it. Thompson tries to sing but cannot. The sweet or sour sound of his own voice raised in song has become a compelling emotion to him, an impulse he cannot control. He cannot now force sounds from his throat, but he can keep running and does. It, too, is an impulse, but this he controls. He slows to a walk. He smiles through his exhaustion. He smiles because he knows himself. He knows he is a man who makes things hard for himself in order to survive. Now he starts running again across the desert to blue mountains, and he thinks of the titles and the words to a dozen songs. The songs are all sad and old.

But Thompson is not old and he has no reason to be sad. But he likes the old and sad songs. They remind him of his grandmother who lived in a worn frame house on the edge of the desert Thompson is now walking and running and trying to sing in. When he was a boy, Thompson had spent summers with his grandmother, a stern but kind woman. He was only allowed to play on the desert's edge. He had, when twelve, wanted to hike across it, to the base of the blue mountains. His grandmother had been horrified when she found him filling a canteen and making sandwiches early one morning. "I can do it," he had told her. "I can cross the desert during daylight and get to the mountains, to the old miner's shack at the base of the mountains, the old guy you told me about. He'll put me up for the night. I want to see the desert and the mountains up close and I want to see the old miner." Thompson's grandmother had locked him in his room for the entire day and had warned him that if he tried to get out to the desert and succeeded in doing so, she would call the sheriff and the helicopter patrol and he would be humiliated, and so would she, when they plucked him from the floor of the desert, worn and bedraggled. "Besides," she had told him, "there's terrible and unknown things out there, and Jeff, the old miner, why he be one of them, maybe the worst!" Thompson's appetite had only been whetted, but he did not stray more than a hundred yards into the desert after that. He spent a good amount of time sitting on the front porch staring out to the desert and the mountains and the miner's shack he imagined, vowing

that one day he would cross the desert. see the miner's shack and perhaps the miner, perhaps even climb one of the blue mountains. His grandmother often joined him on the porch, and he would watch her sitting very still on the swing, knitting and humming songs. Then he would switch his gaze to the desert, and his grandmother would look up and say, "When you're older, boy, when I'm gone, the desert and all in it can be yours, but just remember this. Never start something you can't finish. Now, settle back, and let me sing a few songs for you. Forget that desert for now. And forget old Jeff, the miner, that terrible and evil man. They can wait. All of it can wait."

And Thompson waited, and now, ten years later, his grandmother is gone. He slows to a walk in the desert and hears the songs his grandmother sung to him. He starts running again and he knows he is testing himself for his grandmother, not only for himself now. He is straining and he is surviving for her, the only person he has ever loved. He looks to the blue mountains and wonders if Jeff, the old miner, is still alive and surviving in his shack, still panning for gold in the pitiful little creek that must run down from the low hills just below the mountains. He wishes now his grandmother had told him more about old Jeff and more about the desert. Surely she had known the mysteries and intricacies and intrigues of the desert. She had lived on the edge of it for thirty years. Surely she had known more about Jeff than she had told him ten and twelve and fifteen years ago.

Thompson wants to run again, he is in a hurry to get across the desert, but he is tired and he stops near a large gully and unpacks his knapsnack, drinks water, eats a sandwich. He looks up, briefly, to the sky. It is noon by the sun. Thompson wishes he could sleep a while, an hour, but he is afraid a nap would sap his energy, not restore it, and there is no shade anywhere around for miles. So he sets out. He believes he is half of the way into the desert, half of the way to the place where the terrain starts to rise and change.

All afternoon he runs and walks and stops only occasionally to examine brush and rocks and drink water. There is no wind now. Thompson knows the wind will rise again at night and he knows the desert is cold then. He has brought a blanket, but he believes he can cross the desert before nightfall and look for the miner's shack and, if necessary, reach the

highway and get a ride to town, forty miles away. He knows he cannot attempt to climb a mountain today. Crossing the desert will be enough.

And Thompson wonders again: Why am I so hard on myself? And he answers for the thousandth time: It is an impulse, my life force. I prove myself a living and thinking being. Some people climb mountains. I cross deserts, this one, others later, and perhaps I will even climb a mountain. But the mountain can wait. The desert cannot. And Thompson runs again and tries to sing, but cannot raise his voice above a hoarse cry. He knows now, as the mountains do not appear to be getting much closer, that he is running against time. I am running with time and without it, he thinks. I am running for my grandmother, for my memory of her. Yes, Grandmother, I hear you. Start something, but finish it. Yes, I hear you clearly and I hear your songs, your lovely old and sad songs. Sing one very especially for me. Your favorite one now. All of your songs are crossing over the expanse of time and infinity and the desert to me. Sing loud and long.

Thompson stops running and looks up. He cannot see the sun now. He looks to the horizon. The mountains are not blue now. They are black and they are getting blacker. He sits down by a low and claw-like bush. His mind is now drained of all thought. He is not thirsty, not hungry.

Then, some time later, he feels one night's meteoric reflection, one eternity's first blessing, a prophetic potion of love, a confluent kiss of life to his lips given by his grandmother.

He wakes up and stares at a middleaged man dressed in riding clothes.

"Who are you?" Thompson asks. "Who are you? My name is Jefferson Trask Drake."

"Jefferson—? Jeff?"

"I used to be called that. Get up and get on the horse. What are you doing out here all alone? It's dangerous to spend the night in the desert. Lucky for you I found you. I take early morning rides. Get up."

"Are you a miner?"

Jefferson Drake laughs. "Years ago, in my thirties. Now I'm an investor. My mining days are over. No need to look for gold now. Or uranium. Or anything else. I've found what I need. The mountains were finally good to me. Now I just look at them, and the desert, too. My eyes are still as sharp as they once were, and you'd best be thankful for that."

"Yes," Thompson says, unsteady on his feet. "I'm very thankful to you. Sometimes I push myself. I crossed the desert yesterday."

"Not quite all of it, but enough, I'd say, from the looks of you."

"How old did you say you were?"

"I didn't, but I'm not far from fifty."

"Is that all?"

"It's enough. I look older with this beard, but it's a habit from the old days. Now come on. We have a pretty fair ride on one horse."

Jefferson Trask Drake lived in a splendid and rambling ranch-style rock home overlooking the desert from the front and mountains from the back. Thompson showered and shaved and changed to clothes supplied by Drake and sat now with him in a large oakpaneled den.

"Did you know an old lady who lived across the desert by herself years ago?" Thompson asked. "She died about ten years ago. She lived in a very modest home on the very edge of the desert." Thompson pointed out large bay windows. "That desert out there. On the other side of it."

Drake looked at Thompson. "Yes, the old lady."

"Did you know her, Mr. Drake?"

"Call me Jeff. I don't hear that name much anymore. Damn stock-brokers. All stiff formality. Yes, the old lady. I knew her. The old bitch. Crazy as a jackrabbit. I'd see her in town from time to time. She said some pretty bad things about me. Word got around, but it didn't hurt me." Drake chuckled. "Some bad things. Some true. Some not." Drake shrugged. "She called me a crook, among other things. The crazy old gossipy bitch. I haven't thought about her in a long time. Why do you ask?"

"Are you, Mr. Drake?" Thompson asked, sitting still. "Are you a crook?"

Drake laughed. "I was and I wasn't. I am and I'm not. Who wasn't? Who isn't?

"My grandmother wasn't."

Drake looked out to the desert. "And who was your grandmother?"

"The old lady who lived across the desert. That desert out there. The old lady who lived on the other side of that desert. The old lady. My grandmother. The old bitch."

Drake stood up and walked to the stone fireplace. "I should set a fire. It's going to be cold tonight."

"Yes, it is."

"Look, Thompson, isn't it? Did I get the name right?"

"You got the name right."

"I didn't know the old gal was your grandmother. Why didn't you tell me?"

"I did."

Drake laughed. "You told me a little late."

"It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter when I told you." Thompson stood up. "It doesn't matter that you knew she was my grandmother. And it does. It doesn't matter to you. It does to me."

"Sit down, Thompson. I'll fix you a drink. A cocktail?"

"Nothing, Jeff."

"Well, sit down. Relax. You feeling all right?"

"I feel fine."

"Some food?"

"Nothing, Jeff."

"Look, Thompson," Drake said, leaning against the fireplace. "Everybody knew your grandmother was loony. Really. I'm sorry. But she could have ruined me if people had believed her stories about me." Drake stood up straight and looked towards the large windows, out to the desert. "She really could have done me damage. The crazy old bitch." Drake looked over to Thompson. "Now

forget your grandmother and have a drink. The old bitch is not worth remembering. Believe me, she's not. Now sit down and I'll just go and get us a couple of drinks. Won't take a minute."

He started to move, but Thompson was on him and had him by the throat. Drake, under Thompson, reached over and grabbed the fireplace poker and struck Thompson on the legs, then on his back, and Thompson got up and wrestled the poker away from him. Drake ran to his gun rack and was starting to release a revolver from its clamps when Thompson struck him on the head, watched him fall to the floor, stepped over him and broke the panes, one by one, on the large bay windows. He felt the wind rushing in. It was very hot and dry. It was much hotter and dryer than yesterday.

Thompson, in handcuffs, is watching the desert roll by under him and he is sweetly singing an old and sad song. The helicopter pilot, a sheriff's deputy, says, "What's that song. I like it. It's pretty."

"Yes, it is," Thompson says, as he watches the desert end and sees a housing project and telephone poles. "It is a pretty song."

"What's it from?"

"From? It's from me." Thompson looks down to the desert, back to the edge of it. "It's from me to her."

"Well, I like it. I like the tune. I don't recognize the words."

Thompson takes his eyes from the desert and looks at the deputy. "I'm making up the words. I made up the song." Thompson smiles. "I made it up. I made it all up. Everything. From start to finish, I made it up. To her. To me."

George W. Smyth San Antonio, Texas

Words

As I look at you
I feel confusion
much the same
as the wind
when a tornado
touches down
destroying
houses,
cars,
trees,
and everything else
in its path.

As I listen to you
I hear a record
being played
with a deep scratch
causing the words
to repeat
to repeat
to repeat
distorting
the entire meaning
of the song.

As you listen to me
I wonder
whether
you can hear,
or has deafness
from your tornado
and your repetitious
words
words
words
completely overwhelmed
you?

Natrona Wilson Highland, Indiana



Larry Rapchak

Skylark

Danny and Mike,
One child and one adult,
Walked easily upon wind-bent grass,
Humming together and wondering what high
adventures were yet to come.
The rolling green hills around them
Were like the spent, morning covers of a child's bed.

You'd be surprised how far they were from home. They stowawayed over rough seas, And crossed white deserts on their knees.

The two never trod on ready-made paths. They wanted this journey to be their own.

Ricky Haldeman Reamstown, Pennsylvania

What Beauty Lost

The breezes heavy laden with the sun less frequently about my face do brush; a crystal fog throughout the meadow runs, and southbound flight transcends the morning hush. The leaves, once green, now fire orange and red, play but a moment, then submit to brown; and quickly done, the wind returns the dead to humus caverns buried in the ground. Orion, hunter of the Winter skies, in silence watch Prosepone's retreat; think not of Death (wherein the summer dies) for ever on, the circle runs complete. What beauty lost if man should use the power to alter nature from its chosen hour.

Timothy D. Pell Chesterton, Indiana

You Care

As the sun shines on a mid November afternoon, you give warmth

As newly opened roseleaf is caressed by morning dew, you give love.

As winter's first snow fills children with joy, you give happiness.

As the season of spring fulfills the promise of rebirth, you give trust.

Natrona Wilson Highland, Indiana

The Purpose With Apologies to Dante

Within the darkness of the mind is the essence of all action. The fear of being alone is never so great as when one ceases to question all that evolves around him. For the thinker, knowing the answer is not mere fulfillment, but rather having experienced the triumph of understanding his real purpose.

Midway between the memories of faded semesters and offer of new challenge I woke to find myself in some dark auditorium,

for I had moved beyond the present horizon.

How hard it is to tell what it was like,

this barrier of structured orderliness; demanding and dehumanizing (the thought of it brings back all my old fears),

Seemingly a bitter place with the inescapable threat of competition and the humiliation of not being able to succeed.

To succumb to the temptations of another world would be release, and yet not my form of salvation.

But if I show the good that came of it, I must talk about other things than good.

How I entered there I cannot truly say, I had become so disillusioned at the moment when at first I strayed, leaving reality in search of truth.

I awoke to find a massive structure of many volumes encircling me and after pondering a means of escape, I rose to my feet but the books seemed to close in on me.

And now, from out of nowhere moved a figure in the shape of a man. Fear seized my prior motive;

I sought refuge behind the wall.

While I was moving out of obvious discovery, the figure continued moving closer to me.

He forced me back to where darkness became my only light.

The echo of his footsteps bellowed down the single corridor.

And though I could no longer see him,

my ears noted his distance.

And then, he was before me;

dressed in a fine black robe of silken fabric, a fine statement of scholarly representation.

That superficial attire gave him a strength, and led me to bow in weakness, about which he spoke.

"Why do you shield yourself from that which generates around you? Do you find triumph in stopping that which has not yet begun, or merely never wish to endeavor toward honor?"

And I said to him, lowering my brow in retreat,

"Are you then to be my motivation,

from which I will gain direction toward the proper path?

I anticipate your response and praise your assistance; deliver me through the channels of knowledge,

so that I may be more like you in committed purpose."

"I seek not to remove you from your stance of avoidance," he answered, when he watched my nervous reaction,

"If ever you are to find release in this institution; this beast that you allow to devour you,

must take on a new meaning,

and become peace within the accomplishment of yourself.

And so, I think it best you follow me

that you may review other paths, and I shall be your guide and lead you through an ever present succession of decision

where you will see the search for honor and truth is sometimes distorted envy and greed for reward, and know that scholarly purpose is subjective choice."

Raising his arm, he indicated that I follow him

for our confines were unknown to me and my desire to move onward placed me under his command. Out of our prior background we moved to where the landscape yielded bright light and tossed about our feet were crisp sheets of cardboard cloth.

The pieces moved in circular motion,

spiralling rapidly up toward the heavens,

The air was filled with confusion.

In a closer look, the sheets carried an inscription words in blackened color that began to absorb the white of the paper, getting darker and darker as if to leap out in rage.

"Master," I said, "these words I see are cruel, as they promote emptiness and defeat. It seems they will never cease to exist."

He answered me, "Leave all your doubts behind: for you they are complete, but others here must face the consequence

for they let procrastination become their destiny.

We are at the place where scholars have lost the good of their intellect, the wretched state of being for those who deviated, choosing to delay responsibility in their assignment for artificial reward."

Around us, scholars diligently grappled with their problem, in despair, forcing phrases from inconsequential matter, composing and yet creating nothing.

"Student," my master addressed me,

"all those who assemble here do so because they fear others' expectations, a good student never comes to make this crossing, he admits to the expectation he makes for himself.

There they all were, men and women cut off from hope, living in fear of accomplishment, suffering because they are lost.

Another way we went, descending from the first, into the second circle of scholars, centered in a room filled with uniform columns of metal cabinets.

The drawers settled row upon row, towering well above any feasible height that I could ever reach.

As I watched, the scholars moved up and down strategically placed ladders, with great ease and control, they found whatever they needed

Inside the cabinets, dwelled the feast;

files of every assortment, answers to every question.

"Master," I said, "I pity all the wearied scholars who researched this. Obviously, we must be examining those most devoted;

for it seems, they have willed all that needs to be known, Why then, are they cut off from the rest, are they not models of organization and dedication,

and responsible in their assignment?"

And he said, "There is no greater mistake than to devote intellectual effort to avoid true enlightenment.

To believe that another's work is your own is more than a sad lie, because if ever dawn arrives,

the cheater must face he can trust in nothing, not even himself.

We are at the place where scholars have lost the good of their pride, choosing to deny responsibility in their assignment by duplicating another's."

Around us, scholars diligently grappled with their problem, in deliberation, extrapolating contents from prepared matter, thinking and learning nothing.

"Student," my master addressed me,

"all those who assemble here do so because they fear themselves, a good student never comes to make this crossing.'

Again we went, past the boundary of the second circle, into yet a third,

where barely audible questions and answers were being repeated in succession.

As we entered this room, two groups of scholars were studying one member asking a question, another answering it, by responding in repeated sequence.

Constant movement of marks,

letter grades representative of digested material, enforce the preoccupation of memorization for gratification.

"Master," I said, "These questions they answer show much understanding, They yield exactly what is sought; is supreme knowledge undesirable, now?"

And he to me, "These questions they answer spark no individuality, as they are merely memorizing.

They think nothing more than what is required of them.

We are at the place where scholars have lost the good of their purpose, the wretched state of being for those who deviated, choosing to imitate responsibility in their assignment by assimilating the superficial for material reward."

Around us, scholars diligently grappled with their problem, in false commitment, forcing recall of minimal information, parallelling and concluding nothing.

"Student," my master addressed me,

"all those who assemble here do so because they fear the joy of learning, a good student never comes to make this crossing."

My Master turned toward me, and I toward him.

And I, in my heart did not understand
who the true scholars really were.

I cried out, with a plea that I might be wrong, "And there are no honorable students among them? I, too, then, am fated for disenchantment.

Master, you must tell me what this Fortune is, you touched upon before; lead me to purpose."

He said nothing, and looked at me quite gravely, "You do not see that you are different from the rest, that you question, and search for a center?

Then I have nothing more to give you.

When you have lost your perception of the scholar,

you will fall like the rest.

The power of the mind is your salvation,

Feed your weary spirit with comfort and determination.

Then you will be sure, you are not like the others."

With that he walked away.

I fell into deep concentration over all that had happened, and realized that I did have a purpose.

I came to consciousness in some dark auditorium, for I had moved beyond the present horizon; a barrier of structured orderliness and inescapable competition.

Here I sit, in the darkened auditorium, dressed in a fine black robe of silken fabric, a fine statement of scholarly representation. The superficial attire gives me strength, as the echo of my footsteps bellow down the single corridor, someone is about to call me "Master."

JoAnn Knaver Troxel Schererville, Indiana

Where are you David? You were a rebel who spoke of fighting against everything that's fighting to make you middle-class, run of the mill. You even showed me your drawings of a cabin in some wilderness where one day we'd wake up and not be able to remember any of the channels on T.V.

Laura Johnson Gary, Indiana

Dianne Kresich Bernstein

I Didn't Get My Gun

When I was a kid, I didn't get a gun, Not birthday nor Christmas, just a bent stick for fun.

I'd pow-pow and bam-bam, and pa-ding off the rocks. I'd shoot them all dead, riding a busted T.V. box.

When I was older, I didn't get an air gun, or pellets to shoot a target, a can, a bottle, even the sun.

So now here I'm grown, and don't want a carbine gun. I don't want to blam-bam, pa-ding, or kill anyone.

R. H. Sherman Munster, Indiana

Panic Button

Shopping done and on the run back to the car I flee and stop in frozen disbelief to find I've lost the key.

A frantic search thru pouch and purse and back along the way. The object safe and dangling there, and not a yard away.

Wide blue eyes rolled skyward, imploringly, "Why me?" No answer came and yet I knew "Why not" could rightly be.

The fault, I know, is all my own and none to shame but me. Would someone else to take the blame and tell that it was he.

My senses reel, my pride is hurt. I hate myself, 'tis true. And just this once and nevermore I wish that I were you.

I really hope and truly pray, be it near to home or far that ne'er again will I forget and lock the key in the car.

Jim Thorley Munster, Indiana

Family Man

Henry felt a migraine coming on. The budget meeting was rambling on into its third hour, taking up the whole morning. As Mrs. Burke inconspicuously slid in to pour another round of coffee, Henry focused his attention back on Mr. Freeland, who was soberly announcing the bad news to the department heads. "A five percent increase is all we can afford right now for both the clerical staff and management. Everyone knows how bad off we've been this year. It's your job," his hand waved to include all of them, "to make the people in your department understand. If business gets any worse, we may even have to consider lay-offs."

Mrs. Burke had accidentally skipped over his coffee cup. No matter; he was used to being overlooked. He struggled to listen, but Mr. Freeland's voice rose and fell as the migraine fought for control. The words finally blended with the background muzak filtering through the room, and it wasn't until the other executives stood to leave that Henry realized the meeting was over.

"Here are your messages, Mr. Harkin," Jackie handed them over as he sat at his desk. "Bad news?" She couldn't help but notice his glum manner, which was even more somber than usual.

"No, I just have a headache," he replied brusquely, shuffling through the pink "While You Were Out" slips.

She returned to her desk in the outer office, and soon after he heard a muffled giggle from the other account clerk. His face burned with embarrassment. He guessed Jackie's joke was a comment on his manhood; something to the effect that, in his marriage, he got the headaches while his wife was the one who made the advances.

He was generally regarded around the company as a social dud. Once at last year's Christmas party, he overheard the word "mousy" whispered by the secretary in payroll as he walked by. He didn't go to this year's party, although no one seemed to notice. He was a "quiet" person. Small talk always embarrassed him; he felt foolish even when someone asked

about the weather. It always amazed him that people could say "Nice day, huh?" without the least look of sheepishness.

Depression settled down on him, then suddenly his head reeled as he again became acutely aware of his migraine.

"I'm leaving for home," he walked out into the outer office with his briefcase, gathering his coat and hat from the rack. Well, he thought to himself grimly as he heard laughter from his office echo through the hallway, at least I don't get laughed at at home.

Emily peered out the kitchen window worriedly as she watched him drive the car into the garage. "Is everything okay at work?" she hurriedly asked as he entered the bright kitchen through the back door.

"I'm home early because I have a headache!" he snapped.

"Would you like some lunch?" she asked softly.

"No. I'm going to lie down."

The bedroom door slammed down the hall. Emily poured a cup of coffee and sat down at the table. Her brow furrowed as she sat staring at the yellow daisies on the wallpaper. The baby started to stir in his crib which meant he would awaken soon from his nap, and Bobby would be returning from kindergarten in a few minutes. Sighing, she got up to fix lunch.

When Henry awoke around three, his head felt a little better. Upon his entering the kitchen, Emily asked, "How are you?"

"Better," he replied, not bothering to look up as she placed a cup of coffee in front of him. The kids, who ran in and out of the kitchen, paid no attention to him. Not that he minded; he didn't like to be bothered.

He sat silently drinking his coffee. Emily was used to these lapses of conversation. She absently finished slicing vegetables for her soup and then walked out of the room. He hated the way nothing he did seemed to annoy her, the way she just blocked him out as though he didn't exist.

In the living room, the kids started fighting.

"Mom, tell Justin he can't have my toys," yelled Bobby as he roughly snatched a robot from the one-yearold's hand. Promptly, Justin unleashed an unnerving scream.

Where is she! Henry thought as Justin continued his wail. Henry pushed away from the table and rushed into the living room. "Bobby! What are you doing to him? Do you have to fight all the time?" he yelled gruffly.

Emily ran up the stairs from the basement. "I'll handle it," she said as she quickly picked the baby up off the floor.

"You handle it!" He could feel his body tense. "What makes you think you can handle them now! You've never been able to handle them before! What were you doing anyhow? Why didn't you come sooner?"

"I was downstairs doing the laundry." Emily spoke evenly as she cuddled the now-settled Justin.

"You're the one who spoils them," he ranted on. "If it wasn't for you, ney wouldn't be yelling and fighting ll the time," he yelled, pausing to see her reaction. She ignored the insults and placed the baby on the floor next to his blocks.

Standing up, she said coldly with a wave of her hand, as if to move him out of the way, "Excuse me, I'm going to finish the laundry."

He was tired of being ignored, laughed at. A sense of rage swelled inside his chest. Maybe they could get away with it at work, but not at home. A man was the boss at home.

He grabbed her by the shoulders as she tried to pass.

"Listen to me!" he demanded through clenched teeth, his grip so tight his knuckles were white. "You're really a rotten mother, you know that? These kids have you wrapped around their fingers." It felt good to insult her. It was odd the way damaging her self-esteem raised his.

He was shaking her hard now. Bobby was staring wide-eyed; Justin was

"Let go of me!" she yelled. Enraged, he shook her harder. He wanted to scare her. He would show who was in

control of this household.

"Stop it!" she demanded.

"You're still not afraid of me, are you!" He stopped shaking her and struck her cheek with the palm of his hand. "There, does that scare you?" he yelled, then slapped her again on the same cheek.

Suddenly, he caught the look of horror and confusion in her eyes. Billy and Justin were standing close by, both crying loudly.

He stopped and stood there for a moment, the pleasant odor of soup wafting around them. All his anger subsided as shame gripped him. He walked slowly to his chair and sat down with his hands over his face while Emily grabbed the children to her and glared at him.

He sat for a long time wondering how this had happened, how he had let his rage become so wild, not noticing that his family no longer felt indifferent to him—for that feeling had just been replaced by hate.

Connie Jamrok Highland, Indiana



Night Action

Long Hai base camp lay in a sandy area surrounded by dikes and rice paddies. The paddies stretched away to the north until they hit the base of the mountain there. More mountains lay to the west. And to the east was Long Hai village and beyond that was the South China Sea. Marshes lay to the south beyond a tactical air strip.

The base camp itself was a group of tents and clapboard buildings arranged in rows. One of the clapboard buildings was only half finished, the rafters rearing up like the rib bones of a dinosaur's skeleton. The tents and

buildings were surrounded by an earth bank with a square bunker for a .50 caliber machine gun at each corner. Strung along inside the north wall of the earth bank were three doughnut shaped sandbag emplacements for mortars. The 4.2-inch emplacement was furthest east with the mortar's muzzle facing the mountains to the west. The other two emplacements contained shorter ranged 81 mm mortars, their muzzles facing the mountain to the north.

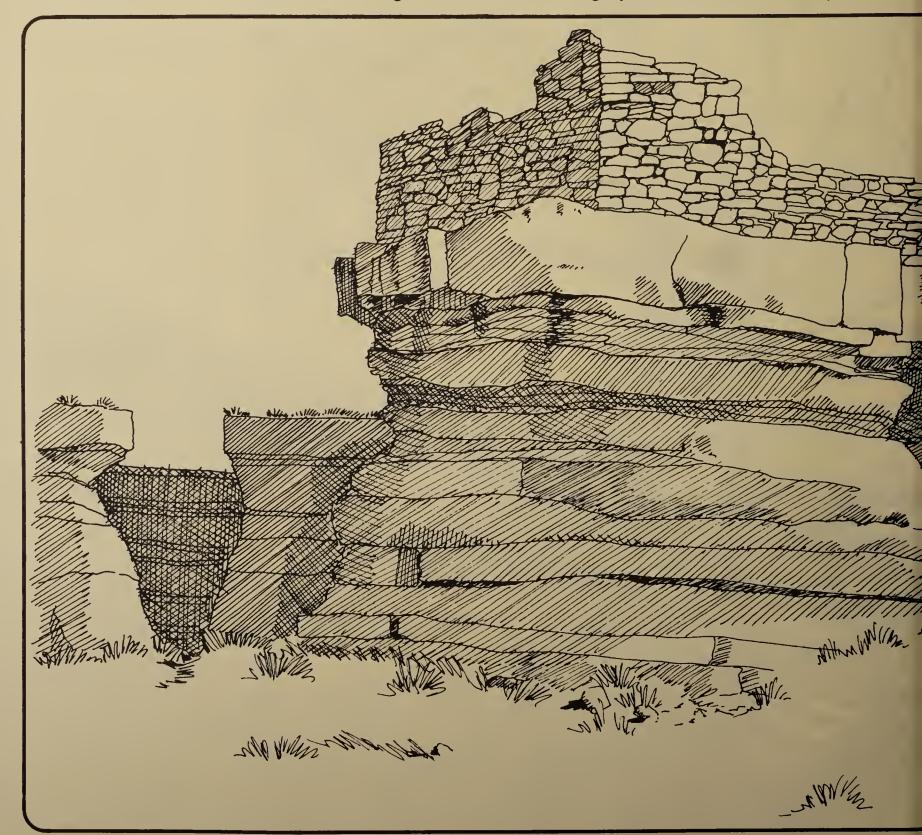
Outside the earth bank were more tents. These belonged to the Cambo-

dian mercenaries employed by the Special Forces Unit that I was attached to. Beyond the tents was a perimeter of barbed wire entanglements.

This was probably how Long Hai looked on the night of 20-21 October 1967. The Vietcong came through the perimeter defenses about 3:45 A.M. after blowing up the barbed wire in about a dozen places on the north side. They first engaged the mercenary forces who fell back to the earth bank.

I woke up to the popping sound of explosions. They came close together, almost like one long rolling sound. Then there was a short silence followed by the banging of small arms fire close in and voices crying in the night. Trouble.

By the time I heard the small arms fire, I was off my cot and had my boots on—I slept with my clothes on. Grabbing my rifle and ammunition belt, I ran



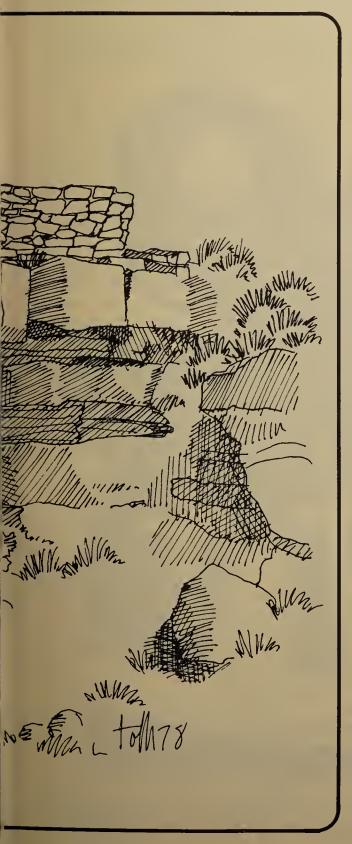
M. Toth

for the 4.2-inch mortar position. I could hear Joe Hutch pounding along behind me. Mortar rounds were dropping inside the perimeter in an earth-shaking storm that tore the night apart with flashes of light and left a deeper darkness behind.

It was only about ten yards from tent to the 4.2-inch mortar pit. It seemed to take me a week to cross that thirty feet. I made the last few feet in a flying dive that took me over the top of the sandbag ring. I landed in a heap on the ground next to the mortar.

Before I could get my breath back, an incoming mortar round picked me up and slammed me down again. What felt like part of the sandbag wall fell on me. I went down with the air whoofing out of my open mouth and ate sand. I couldn't breathe.

I squirmed around and the weight pressing me into the sand went away. A



voice started making noises in my ear. "Unh?" I asked, spitting sand.

"Get up and help me turn this thing around!" Hutch yelled at me.

I looked up, spitting more sand. Hutch was standing over me outlined against the glare of parachute flares hanging like little suns in the darkness. He was straining to lift one of the legs of the mortar bipod. He had no shirt on, and his gut muscles stood out like a bunch of taut ropes as he strained.

Spitting sand, I crawled over to help him. As I did, Gibbs came crawling into the pit. He had come straight from the NCO club, and his eyes were bloodshot from a night's boozing. Gibbs didn't really crawl into the mortar pit. He just sort of oozed over the sandbags and recollected into a human on the floor of the pit.

"Hi," he said grinning like an idiot. I started to answer, but Hutch interrupted.

"Give me a hand!" he screamed through clenched teeth.

I jumped to help him and got tangled up with Gibbs. We went down in a heap. I kicked loose and got up to help Hutch.

Behind me Gibbs was pulling a beer can out of the cargo pocket of his camouflage fatigues. I heard the popping sound of the pull tab being pulled loose and the slurping gurgle of Gibbs taking a long pull on the beer. He didn't even know that a fight was going on.

I grabbed the leg of the bipod opposite Hutch and heaved. I felt my guts swell like Hutch's. We heaved again together on the mass of iron. Finally, with grudging slowness it reared up between Hutch and me and we waltzed it around so that the muzzle was more or less facing the enemy. Hutch let his side go, but I held on. The mortar pulled its four hundred pound weight from my grip. I felt a slight pull in my chest, then nothing more, but for years after I couldn't lift anything heavy without a burning sensation in my chest.

The tube had come down canted over to one side. It should have been leveled but Gibbs was already staggering over to it with a shell hugged to his chest like a baby. He lifted it in both hands and dropped it into the gaping mouth of the mortar tube.

There was a strange muffled pop, and the shell seemed to float up from the gun muzzle. It went almost straight up and dropped down to bounce off the roof of a machine gun bunker forty feet away. It rolled out of sight without exploding.

"Put a propellant charge on the next one, okay?" Hutch yelled as he shook Gibbs.

There weren't any propellant charges in our position. Those were kept in the main ammunition bunker which was exploding under multiple hits from enemy shells. It burned with a white hot glare.

Hutch looked at the fire mouthing silent curses for a minute, then turned back to the 4.2-inch mortar. He got on the range adjustment and cranked the tube down until the muzzle was at maximum depression.

"Okay, let's try it again," he said to Gibbs.

Gibbs staggered over to the muzzle with another shell cradled in his arms and dropped it in the tube. It floated out of the muzzle with that same strange popping noise and looped over the perimeter wall just missing the top. Silence followed.

"Not enough range to activate the detonator," I yelled.

"Get over on the wall with your Cambodes," Hutch told Gibbs and me.

We all went over the sandbag ring in different directions. I headed for the section of wall that 1st platoon was holding. I got sidetracked on the way.

Stryker, one of the medics, grabbed me as I ran by the sandbagged tent that served as the camp hospital.

"Come on. I need you," he said as he pulled me inside.

Inside the tent was a hot stinking madhouse. It was dark except for a pool of light cast by a flashlight in a corner. And that darkness was filled with the sounds of dying.

I followed Stryker toward the pool of light, almost gagging from the stench of busted guts hanging in that still air. He stooped down and worked on something on the floor by the light of the flashlight. His arm moved in vague pumping motions and fumbled with something else.

Light filled the room in a sudden wave. Stryker stood up holding a spotflood that operated from bottled gas and set it on my shoulder.

"Hold it steady so we can see to work," he said.

I looked around the tent as Stryker bent over the table in front of me. The stink in the air came from about a dozen broken bodies scattered on the work tables. The medics hurried among them trying to save lives, but some of them were beyond help. Some of them were beyond anything but screaming. They added their cries to the general roar of mortar and gunfire and were almost lost in it.

A scream, high and womanish, came from the table Stryker was bent over. I started gritting my teeth and felt the chills roll down my spine as they grated on the sand in my mouth. I turned my head and spit a mouthful of sand and saliva on the dirt floor.

Another scream, like the first, followed by others brought my head snapping back. I looked over Stryker's stooping shoulder. A woman lay on the table, her stomach bloated with life.

She screamed again, and I realized that she must have been screaming when I came in.

"How long?" I asked Stryker.

"A long time," he said. "I'm going to have to go after it."

I didn't know what he meant. I stared, fascinated, as he flipped back the covering sheet and exposed her belly and thighs.

"Hold that light real steady," Stryker said over his shoulder as he picked up a stainless steel scalpel.

He held it poised for a moment, then drew it slowly down across the woman's belly. It made a red line in the distended flesh. He drew again along the line, and the flesh rolled back. The woman screamed again, and I looked away and grated my teeth wondering if she'd been given anything to ease the pain.

Stryker went on making cutting noises and the woman went on screaming. I held the light and looked away, clenching my teeth, and felt the sand grate and spit on the floor. I wanted to puke.

The cutting and screaming went on for a long time. It was long enough for more wounded to be brought in, some of them to be taken back out. I kept looking away. I was watching a man who had just been carried in. He had his hands clenched over his stomach and blood welled up between his fingers. He was gasping, and the gasps kept time with the bursting of mortar shells. Not for long. Something happened in his eyes as I watched him, and he stopped gasping and made a rattling noise and was gone.

I looked away from the dead man back at the screaming woman. She had stopped screaming and began moaning. Stryker had pulled something out of her belly. It was a smelly, wrinkled little thing covered with globs of mucus and blood.

He cut it loose and slapped it. It began to cry, adding its noise to new life to the sounds of dying. My knees felt like pools of water, and I had trouble standing up.

"You okay?" Stryker grinned looking at my pale face.

"No!"

He turned back to sponge off the baby, laughing as he did. My stomach churned and the stink got worse. More than once shrapnel had come through the tent and more came then. It whizzed through, cutting the air like a swarm of angry bees.

I ducked and the light bobbed.

"Hold that light steady!" yelled one of the medics.

"Shove it!" I yelled back.

I wanted out of there.

"Hang that thing on the overhead hook and get out of here before you throw up," Stryker told me.

"Thanks," I said to his back, but he was working on the woman again.

I picked up my rifle and ran out of the tent away from the stink of passing life. I ran in a straight line for the wall and ended up by the .50 caliber machine gun bunker. There wasn't any noise coming from it. Bad.

I ran inside. Wilson was crouched over the machine gun, cranking the operating lever back and forth. Billy Bad Boy and one of the Cambodian mercenaries were crouched at his side, staring at his frenzied movements as if they held the key to life.

A face appeared in the view slit next to the machine gun muzzle. I whipped up my rifle without giving it any real thought and fired. The face disappeared.

"Dump the gun," I yelled shouldering Wilson aside.

I pushed one hand against the receiver and one hand on a leg of the tripod. It didn't move at first. Then it started to slide and kept sliding until it went out through the view slit and fell on whoever was outside—a nice sur-



prise, one hundred and thirty pounds of hot iron falling from above.

I pulled the pin from a frag and let the spoon go, counting oneandtwoandthree, and heaved it underhand through the view slit. It exploded almost immediately. I followed it with another, listening to the screams from outside with part of my mind as I did. I was priming a third when something sailed in through the view slit and thumped on the ground.

"Grenade!" Billy Bad Boy yelled as he and Wilson and the Cambodian mercenary clogged the bunker doorway.

I climbed out through the view slit with the grenade's explosion hurrying me the last few inches. The blast pushed me out and dumped me at the bottom of the slope. I landed on the still hot machine gun.

I rolled over and got up. There was a rifle muzzle thrusting at me. I kicked it aside and heaved the unprimed grenade I was holding at the face above. It hit near the eye and the man staggered back.

He shook his head and started to raise his rifle again. I pulled my Randall from its sheath and jumped on him, letting him have it in the guts. I felt the knife thud into his warm flesh and shuddered as it did. We fell and thrashed and rolled on the ground, locked together like two lovers in an embrace. His face was just inches from mine, eyes glazed with pain, but still aware enough to know I was his executioner and to hate me for it. A keening wail came through his clenched teeth as he gripped me as if intent on taking me on that last journey with him.

I pushed up and away from him and tore the knife free. It vibrated and pulsed like a live thing, and the keening wail became an animal scream of rage. He wouldn't die like he was supposed to. He clutched and clawed at me as I pulled free. But his strength was failing and I kicked him loose.

A face loomed out of the night and I slashed at it. Blood spurted and the face fell away with its hands clutched over a ruined eye. It was screaming.

Movement came in the corner of my eye, and I turned lunging. It was a man with a rifle and I knew as I lunged that he had me. The man I had stabbed clutched at my legs tripping me.

I went down and pushed myself back up with one hand holding the knife uselessly out in front of me. I thought I saw the faint gleam of triumph in the rifleman's eyes, but it disappeared with the side of his head. He fell forward to impale himself on my out-thrust knife as Poe ran by us, a smoking rifle in his hands.

I fell backward, the dead man on top of me. I pushed him aside and started to get up, faintly aware that there were men fighting all around me. Then something exploded behind my eyes and a black wave washed over me, carrying me back to where it came from.

I came back to the throbbing roar of pain in my head. I wanted to just lie there and hurt, but there was something I had to do. I couldn't remember what.

I began to push myself up from the ground, trying to keep my body under my throbbing head. It was approaching daylight. The sky was turning gray pale and lifeless as the face of a dead man.

There was a man sitting on the ground not far away. I pushed the pain away and came slowly to my feet. I had a dead man's rifle in my hand. I didn't even know if it worked.

I moved slowly toward the man with the rifle gripped to either swing or shoot. The pain was pushing back and my head was beating like a big drum. I came over him like a shadow. He didn't move.

It was Lee, one of ours. He had a dead man cradled in his lap, one of ours too. He was holding his arm which was slashed open to the bone. He was staring at it like he'd never seen anything quite like it before.

"Lee?" I said.

"I'm hurt," he said softly without looking up.

"Come on. I'll get you to the hospital," I said bending toward him.

For awhile it was a tossup whether I'd get Lee up or he'd get me down. I won somehow. When I got him up, one of his legs hung slack, pulsing blood. We moved off toward the perimeter wall at a sort of crawling walk. Lee must have been in shock because he hardly complained when I banged him around trying to pull him up over the wall. It was a losing battle.

"Easy fella," Poe said as I started to slide to the bottom for the third or fourth time.

He pulled us both over the top and steered us to the medic tent. The whole camp was a ruin. Everything was burned or blown apart. The 4.2-inch mortar pit had been flattened by a direct hit.

When we got to it, the hospital tent had the roof mostly burned off. There were a lot more dead piled outside. Men were carrying wounded out on stretchers to be flown out on helicopters to Long Binh complex. As we stopped to let some of them by, I saw a vaguely familiar woman carried by. She was holding a baby clutched in her arms. They'd made it. Both of them.

We got Lee inside, and I had slumped down outside to go to sleep when I heard a sudden burst of firing. The helicopters which had been coming in to pick up wounded suddenly gained altitude. There was a lot of yelling coming from the perimeter wall over by the .50 caliber machine gun bunker where I had almost gotten blown up by the grenade.

"Come on," Poe said throwing me a rifle.

I just sat and looked at the rifle that I had caught almost by reflex. I wanted to lie next to the tent and sleep forever.

"Come on," Poe said again. "They found a live one outside the wall. He shot at the helicopters and they won't come in until we clear the area again."

I followed him over the earth embankment, and we began to check the dead lying out there. It was simple. We just re-killed them.

I walked along, pausing to put bullets into each corpse. They jolted in a momentary parody of life and then were still again forever. It hurt.

I found the one with my Randall in his chest. Next to him, his hands still clawed as if grasping something, lay the one who wouldn't die when I stabbed him. He didn't hate anymore. He didn't feel anymore. I killed them again.

I looked away from the dead and up at the sun. It was shining down through the haze of battle smoke as bright and clear as always. I looked away from the unchanging sun and saw Poe re-killing the dead.

The sight of him stopped me for a moment. He was just a kid. He should have been on some college campus instead of at Long Hai. He wasn't though. He was there with the rest of us.

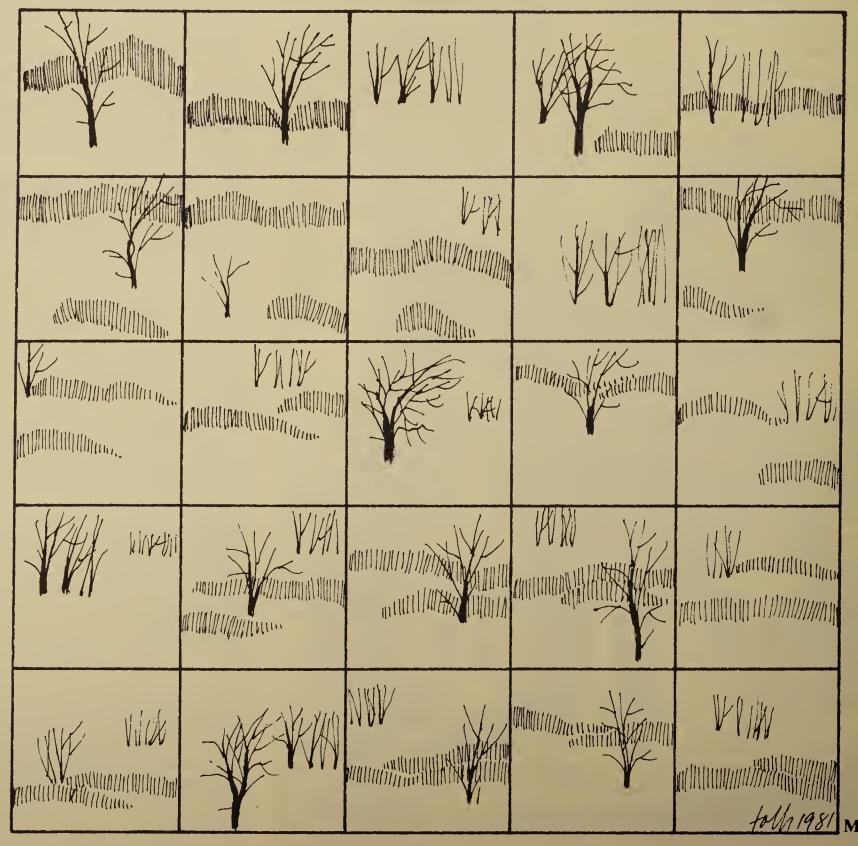
We were all like Poe. Somewhere else we would have been different, something else. But, we weren't somewhere else. We were at Long Hai, and we would smell of it for a lifetime.

I wanted to be away from there. I wanted to be anywhere but where I was. I closed my eyes for a moment wishing., When I opened them I was still at Long Hai. I went on re-killing the dead.

David Spencer Fair Oaks, Indiana

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